

SEPTEMBER 2012
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THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

*Buy
Australian?*

Supermarkets snub
local products

**HOW TO BEAT DODGY
PARKING FINES**

BETTER BREWS
Original import beers
vs Aussie copies

TESTS

smartphone GPS apps
ceiling fans
lawn trimmers
double strollers
edge trimmers
portable cots
awn edgers
ridges
ovens

**SIZE DOES
MATTER**
Servings
under
scrutiny



Are you being served?

The big retailers putting customers last

Passing on the baton

It's the end of an era at CHOICE as outgoing CEO Nick Stace hands over the reins to Alan Kirkland

When I announced my resignation from CHOICE three months ago, it was my intention to give the organisation sufficient time to find a suitable successor. I am delighted that the board has focused a great deal of time searching, sifting and ultimately selecting a fabulous new CEO, and it is my pleasure to hand over the baton to Alan Kirkland.

Having spent the past few days with Alan, I have every confidence that he will continue to look at every way CHOICE can add value to your membership. Alan will also actively be seeking your input into what we do and redoubling the efforts of CHOICE to create a better future for all consumers in Australia.

Alan has an extremely impressive track record, most recently as CEO of Legal Aid NSW where he grew both the revenues and the impact the organisation was able to have. I know Alan is keen to build on our two consecutive years of growth and expand the services and products that we currently

offer, and to make what we do totally indispensable in the lives of our members.

As a Pom handing over the baton to an Aussie (but being far too polite to mention the recent Olympics medals table), I wish Alan and the remarkable team at CHOICE a very successful future.

But it is for our members that I have a final word. Earlier today I completed my final lab tour with members, an initiative we started three years ago. I spoke with a member who called about an area he thought we should investigate; and I answered an email from a member who wished me well on my travels.

Being accessible to members has been both a pleasure and a responsibility that I've taken very seriously. A pleasure, because it seems that being a member of CHOICE is shorthand for being decent and caring about the world in which we live, which has meant that I've met hundreds of very decent, caring members indeed. It's also been a responsibility, because as the head of Australia's largest independent consumer group it is important to be connected to the issues that people care most deeply about.

Thank you to you all for what you bring to CHOICE every day and for having made my time here so welcoming and productive.

Goodbye and good luck.

Nick

To contact our new CEO, Alan Kirkland
Phone: 1800 266 786
Email: alan@choice.com.au

For general membership and consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552

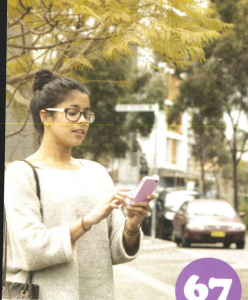


CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for all the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, choice.com.au and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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CHOICE's Rachel Clemons finds one size doesn't fit all when it comes to food portions



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So near, yet...

Retail payments through near field communication (NFC) technology, which allows shoppers to pay for purchases via their mobile phones, will exceed \$180bn globally by 2017, a seven-fold increase over 2012, a report from UK-based research company Juniper claims. However, despite the uptake of NFC by mobile phone manufacturers, the report also claims retailers aren't embracing the new technology, "and are unwilling to invest in contactless infrastructure so soon after the transition to chip and PIN".

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Click, click, boom?

Online shopping in Australia is predicted to be worth \$16bn in 2012 – accounting for 6.3% of all retail sales – according to research by PWC and Frost & Sullivan.

The *Australian and New Zealand Online Shopping* report also found offshore online shopping has increased by 20% in the past year to \$7.2bn, and represents 45% of Australia's total internet shopping spend.

However, CHOICE head of campaigns Matt Levey argues that "while online shopping is growing, it still represents a small slice of where Australians are spending their money".

A Productivity Commission inquiry report released late last year found Australia to be lagging behind comparable countries in its development of online retailing.

"It is clear that some Australian retailers need to lift their game to stay competitive, including by combining online and offline channels," says Levey. **SAM BUTLER**

What a waste

Australians waste over \$1.1bn worth of fruit and vegetables each year, according to the *Australia's Food and Nutrition 2012* report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. This is despite the fact that national nutrition surveys show most adults (91%) aren't eating enough vegetables and only 50% are eating enough fruit.

Other key findings from the report include that farm numbers in Australia have been declining in recent times but the average size of farms has increased by about 23%, and the two major supermarket chains have almost 80% of the packaged grocery market. For details, visit aihw.gov.au. **RACHEL CLEMONS**

\$237

Average weekly household spend on food and beverages*

\$5bn

worth of food is thrown out each year

90%

of our food is grown in Australia



Targeting kids

Australian retailer Target has revealed a marketing strategy aimed directly at their smallest market yet – five-year-old children.

The managing director of Target, Dene Rogers, recently presented the retail giant's four-year transformation plans at the Wesfarmers Strategy Briefing day, revealing its intentions to develop into a leading mid-tier department store. One of the key initiatives was a focus on five-year-olds, who, according to Rogers, begin to become independent and exercise their own choices at this age.

Tactics will include advertising on TV and via social media, as well as

plans to develop an online facility where children can shop online. Target argues that, given the trend towards online shopping across the board, this kind of initiative will benefit parents, who can teach their children how to shop online safely.

How parents will react to another form of pester power remains to be seen, but Target has stated publicly it does not believe that five-year-olds are too young to be marketed to.

KATE BROWNE



Not so super

Most superannuation accounts had a less-than-stellar 2012-13, squeaking out a median gain of just 0.4%, according to the industry analysis firm SuperRatings. This seems especially lacklustre when measured against the 6.3% aggregate return over the past three financial years.

But SuperRatings founder Jeff Bresnahan struck an optimistic note, saying the result "should be seen for what it is, namely the third consecutive positive gain for balanced options since the lows of the GFC". ("Balanced option" is the default choice for about 65% of Australians across the major funds, the firm says.) And things could be worse. Over the five years to June 2012, most balanced option super funds accounts went south, returning about -0.2%.

The Industry Super Network had its own spin on the data, reporting that industry funds have delivered a median return of 5.87% over the past 10 years compared with 3.92% for retail funds. SuperRatings claims to have data on \$370bn worth of super, or about seven million accounts.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

BREAKING NEWS Mice and men

Researchers in the US have discovered a compound that may be used in the first hormone-free contraceptive pill for men. In mice, a small molecule blocks the cell division necessary for normal sperm production, says Professor Robert McLachlan, director of clinical research at Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research.

According to the researchers, the drug has no significant side effects. However, it's in early stages of development and may take 15 years to become available for human use. Read about current contraceptive options on page 35.

Claims culled

Nurofen's claims that its products target the source of pain have earned it a slap on the wrist from the TGA's advertising Complaints Resolution Panel to go with its 2010 CHOICE Shonky. The panel argued that a reasonable consumer viewing the ads would form a view that Nurofen goes straight to the source of the pain (the head, in this case) and have effects only there – something the panel agreed was misleading. Reckitt Benckiser, Nurofen's parent company, has been ordered not to use the claims in future advertising of Nurofen and headache relief.

Do you care?

Do you have some tips and tricks for keeping clothes, shoes or handbags nice, or do you throw them away once they start looking shabby? Let us know – investigation@choice.com.au.

Don't spray it

Some fake tan options may not be as safe as previously thought, according to new reports.

US researchers recently raised concerns over the safety of spray tans after finding links between dihydroxyacetone (DHA, a key ingredient found in many fake-tan formulations) and cancer.

In the US, the Food and Drug Administration has approved DHA for external use only, stating it "should not be inhaled or ingested". However, spray tans are usually applied in a small booth where it can be difficult to avoid breathing in the product.

The SunSmart Victoria website (sunsmart.com.au) states that DHA could be harmful if inhaled, but as this research was based on cells in the lab, not in humans, the results are not conclusive. SunSmart warns there is a conclusive link between sunbed use and melanoma and urges people to be content with their natural skin tone.

KATE BROWNE

Riding the wave

Ocean waves could potentially supply about 10% of Australia's electricity by 2050, according to a recent report on wave energy technology from the CSIRO.

The *Ocean renewable energy: 2015-2050* report identified Perth, the southern coastline and the east coast of Australia as the key areas that could benefit from this new technology.

RACHEL CLEMONS

10%

of Australia's electricity could be supplied by ocean waves by 2050

Streaks away



There are vacuum cleaners designed for just about every cleaning job – floors, cars, wet spills – but a vacuum cleaner for windows? Karcher claims its battery-powered WV 70 Plus cleans windows perfectly in no time at all – without any streaks. "No time at all" may be a little optimistic, but it does leave a streak-free finish.

The WV 70 Plus set includes the window vac itself with squeegee attachment (280mm wide; a 170mm attachment can be bought separately for use on smaller areas), plus a spray bottle with a microfibre pad attachment, detergent concentrate and recharger. Extra detergent sachets can be purchased, though regular detergents from the supermarket will probably work just as well. Glass that's not too dirty can be cleaned with plain detergent-free water (tap water is fine).

You first spray the window with detergent and water and wipe it with the microfibre pad to remove most of the grime, then immediately vacuum the dirty water residue from the glass with the window vac. The result is a clean, dry, streak-free window.

You can also use the WV 70 Plus on mirrors – or, indeed, any smooth

surface. Our tester, Peter Horvath, tried it on windows (inside and outside surfaces), mirrors and bathroom wall tiles. He found it works well in all cases – although, since outside window surfaces are often fairly dirty, you might want to give them an initial clean with a hose or cloth, to avoid clogging the microfibre pad with too much dirt.

The WV 70 Plus has a 3.6V lithium battery and runs for 20 minutes on a full charge. Charging takes two hours.

CHOICE verdict

The Karcher WV 70 Plus is very easy to use and gives a nice, streak-free finish on glass. Other window-cleaning options such as microfibre cloths and glass-cleaning sprays cost less, but if you have a lot of windows or wall tiles and like to keep them sparkling clean, the Karcher will save you a lot of time and effort.

CHRIS BARNES

KARCHER WINDOW VAC WV 70 PLUS

PRICE \$149

CONTACT karcher.com.au



Nervous about nano

Friends of the Earth has called on the ACCC to investigate alleged misleading conduct by two companies that supply zinc oxide used in sunscreen.

Based on assurances from these suppliers, products containing the zinc oxide claim they're "nano-free". However, testing by the National Measurement Institute shows the zinc oxide contains nano materials, mainly consisting of large aggregates of nanoparticles.

Despite lack of convincing evidence that these larger aggregates can pass through skin, the concern stems from the possibility of nano materials being more reactive than their non-nano counterparts.

The Cancer Council Australia, which sold affected products, fears concerns over nano materials could discourage people from using sunscreen, pointing out that while there's evidence sunscreen helps protect against UV radiation, there's no evidence nano materials in sunscreen are harmful.

KARINA BRAY & ANGELA McDUGALL



Easy on the spam

Australians have been doing much better in recent months when it comes to preventing spammers from hijacking their computers and spreading "quick cash" bait and malicious links. A report by the IT security firm Sophos covering April through June this year ranks Australia as 52nd on the list of spam-relaying countries. In September last year we were ranked 25th.

The top five spam enablers in the report were India, Italy, South Korea, USA and Vietnam. ACMA chairman Chris Chapman was pleased, saying spam reports to the agency went up sixfold in 2011-12.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

> I SAY

Sample shocker

I love a bargain and I love shoes. So I was pretty excited when an email arrived the other day letting me know that Sambag, a shop I love, was having an online sample sale, starting at 9.30am the next morning.

"Fantastic! I'll pick up a pair of their very-lovely-but-usually-out-of-my-price-range shoes," I thought.

I'd love to say I'm now the proud owner of a pair of gorgeous ballet flats. But I'm not, and here's why.

At 9.30am on the nominated day [a day off for me] I went to the Sambag website. I had to set up an account to shop in the sale, but despite my efforts to get in quick, the site was slow to respond and it took more than half an hour.

Account set up, I was told that to access the sale, I'd have to like their page on Facebook and then log onto my Facebook account through their site. After doing all that, I was told that the sample sale was for size 39 shoes only. As a 38, there were no shoes for me.

To soften the blow, Sambag reassured me there were lots of other fabulous things such as handbags included in the sale. So I started shopping.

I found a bag I liked at an amazing price, put it into my virtual basket, and kept browsing. As I was having some difficulties with the site, I checked Sambag's Facebook page. It was there I realised, from the comments of increasingly aggravated wannabe-customers, that there was in fact only one of each sale item available in the sale, but even once sold it did not disappear from the site.

The bag I thought I'd secured was gone, and so was I – over to another site, where I bought a handbag at a great price in less than five minutes.

I've since received an email from Sambag apologising, and offering me a \$30 voucher to use on their current range. No deal. I've unliked Sambag on Facebook.

ELIZABETH McNESS

"The bag was gone and so was I – over to another site ..."





The truth about textiles

We've had a huge response to our story on chemicals in clothing (see *CHOICE*, June 2012 or choice.com.au/clothingchemicals), with many readers contacting *CHOICE* to find out how to avoid possibly dangerous clothing. One of our experts suggests consumers look for organic cottons.

But with more companies jumping on the organic bandwagon it can be difficult to know which claims are legitimate and which are just hot air. The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is recognised as the leading processing standard for textiles made from organic fibres worldwide. It defines high-level environmental criteria along the entire supply chain of organic textiles, from the harvesting of raw materials through environmentally and socially responsible manufacturing right up to labelling, which provides information for the consumer. For more information on the GOTS label, head to global-standard.org.

KATE BROWNE

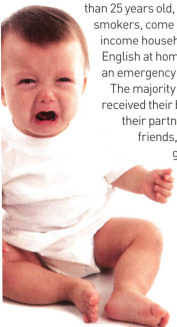
Baby blues

One in five mothers of children aged up to 24 months old have suffered depression, the 2010 Australian National Infant Feeding Survey found. Baby blues are more common in mothers who are younger than 25 years old, overweight, smokers, come from lower income households, speak English at home or have had an emergency caesarean.

The majority of the mums received their best support from their partner, family and friends, while mothers'

groups or support groups provided only little or no support for most.

If you or your partner have depression, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. **UTA MIHM**



20%

Number of mums with children up to two years old who have suffered depression

Green origins

The Greens have proposed sweeping changes to country-of-origin labelling rules for food products.

Leader Christine Milne announced a new bill would be put to parliament that would seek to do away with the "Made in Australia" claim, which relates to the processing of foods in Australia, and instead focus on the origin of ingredients.

However, *CHOICE* believes this may remove valuable information.

Healthy dose of regulation

Occupational therapists, practitioners of Chinese medicine and medical radiation, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners joined Australia's national registration and accreditation scheme in July this year.

The purpose of health practitioner regulation is to protect the public by ensuring that only health practitioners who have the skills, qualifications and knowledge to provide safe care are registered.

There is a national board for each profession, which is supported by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). These boards set the professional standards that each practitioner must meet to be registered.

Other health professions in the national scheme are chiropractic, dentistry, medicine, nursing and midwifery, optometry, osteopathy, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology. You can check the registration of health practitioners in these areas, and if you have any concerns about a practitioner you can make a notification to the relevant board or AHPRA (ahpra.gov.au).

KARINA BRAY

Our country of origin survey, reported in May 2011, found many consumers feel it is important to be able to identify foods manufactured in Australia.

It is unclear at this stage whether the bill will retain the "Made in Australia from local and imported ingredients" claim. Although this claim was reasonably well understood by respondents to our survey, it fared poorly in *CHOICE*'s Australia Day quiz earlier this year.

Courting resolution

The National Dispute Resolution Council has published a new *Dispute Resolution* guide in an attempt to help consumers work out disputes among themselves and to steer clear of the courts.

Much of the advice offered by the council could be described as commonsense, such as "be open to other points of view" and "find out what the other people involved want, for example, by asking them".

With the launch of the new guide, federal Attorney-General Nicola Roxon sounded a warning to the litigation-minded, saying new court fees in the 2012-13 budget "have the capacity to send pricing signals to people that the courts should not be the first port of call for resolving disputes".

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Talkback

Do you care where your food products come from? What's more important to you, the origin of ingredients, location of processing, or both? Email us at talkback@choice.com.au

The Greens admit that country-of-origin labelling for processed foods is a complex area and are looking for input from stakeholders and consumers on clear terminology. We've long been calling for improvements to country-of-origin labelling and hope the bill will rekindle debate over this issue.

ANGELA McDUGALL

Sporty but not spicy

We took the sporty Honda CR-Z hybrid for a spin to see if it had the get up and go that we expected.

Performance

Like many hybrids, it offers different modes of driving: sport, normal (the default when you turn on the engine) and eco. The model we tested has a six-speed manual gearbox, the first of its type we've seen on a hybrid. It's quick to change gears and has a sporty feel to it. But it's designed for sportiness, not comfort, so you'll feel every bump in the road. It's very stable when cornering fast – more so than any other hybrid we've tested. It took 11 seconds to go from 0-100 km/h in sport mode, which isn't particularly quick. The brakes feel powerful and will stop the car quickly from any speed – 9.7m from 50km/h. The steering is very responsive and direct.

Comfort

The cabin is reasonably comfortable, with supportive seats that are designed to keep you in place. The dashboard and door trims are hard plastic. As with most small cars, a fair bit of road noise enters the cabin when driving on rough roads, and wind noise from the A-pillars is always present at

speeds over 100km/h. Rear visibility is restricted by a small back window and a horizontal divider. While the wing mirrors have a curved design that compensates for the loss of rear vision through the window, it will take some getting used to. The dash is also a little cluttered. The CR-Z claims to be a four-seater, but in reality the rear seats are only really useable for short distances – sitting in them is uncomfortable for most.

Savings

Honda claims the car uses 5L/100km of fuel but we found it to be closer to 5.8L/100km. As with other hybrids, the petrol engine turns off when you come to a stop.

CHOICE verdict

While this car is fun to drive, handles well in sport mode and is relatively economical, it lacks the power that would be expected given its 1.5L engine capacity. **MATTHEW STEEN**

HONDA CR-Z SPORT

PRICE \$38,875 (Sport),

\$45,388 (Luxury)

CONTACT honda.com.au

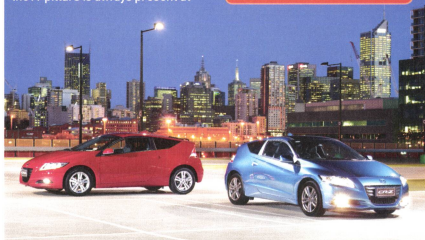


IMAGE: HONDA AND ISTOCKPHOTO

choice MEMBERS NOTICEBOARD

We compare, you save

Do you like getting the best deal but have better things to do than run around town? As a CHOICE member you get free access to our CHOICE Shopper service.

CHOICE Shopper does the shopping and negotiating on your behalf so you get the best price. We can help you find the best deal on electrical appliances for the laundry and kitchen, home entertainment products, cameras, lenses and accessories, mowers and brushcutters, computers, printers and scanners, and even cars worth more than \$10,000!

To find out more, visit choice.com.au/ choice-shopper or call 1300 360 655 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm).

Please note: CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.



Lab Tours

Are you curious about how CHOICE tests hundreds of products every year? To find out, come along to one of our Lab Tours in Marrickville, Sydney. Upcoming tours will be held at 10.30am on Wednesday, 12 September and Friday, 19 October 2012. For more information, go to choice.com.au/about-us/lab-tours or email us at labtours@choice.com.au to make a booking. Numbers are limited, so book now.

IMAGE: ISTOCKPHOTO

Member spotlight



Introducing CHOICE member Paul Melling, a customs officer with almost three decades of experience. He has lived all over Australia and currently resides in the ACT. Paul has two sons and a daughter.

Why did you join CHOICE?

To get decent tests on products. I like the fact that you test a lot of different brands in varying price ranges, and are impartial.

While the magazine is not cheap, it's a bloody good investment.

What section of CHOICE Online do you view first?

I look at the major product tests, if they impact on me. I like to read others' comments, the news and so on. I then tend to surf randomly.

Have you made any CHOICE recommended purchases?

Oh yes! I've bought a Miele vacuum cleaner and a front-loading washing machine. Both have been faultless for almost a decade, and the washer is so good to use, reliable, and cleans really well. And, it is also easy to use the water on the garden.

What CHOICE campaigns have you found to be most important to you?

None in particular, except maybe banking. I just like the fact that CHOICE is there campaigning! And the Shonkys, I love them!

What product/s would you like to see CHOICE put to the test?

I bought a cyclone attachment for the vacuum cleaner. It works well and bypasses so much stuff to the bowl, but I wonder if it is good for the cleaner in the long run. I'm also concerned about the safety of a lot of items such as the multi-ladder that is advertised endlessly. They often claim that it meets Australian standards requirements, but I wonder.

Tell us about your CHOICE experiences – become our next Member in the Spotlight! Send us an email at inthespotlight@choice.com.au.

Diary note

Come and see us at the Baby and Toddler Show on 28-30 September at the Sydney Exhibition Centre, where our experts will be presenting on the Main Stage (see page 66 for details). You could **WIN one of 10 double passes** to the Baby and Toddler Show by putting your hand up to be one of our next members in the spotlight. The first 10 members to email us at inthespotlight@choice.com.au will win.



A man with a plan

Joe Ludwig, the Minister for Agriculture,

Fisheries and Forestry, has released the *National Food Plan Green Paper*, the next step in the process of developing the National Food Plan.

CHOICE has been actively involved, calling for the National Food Plan to prioritise the right of Australian consumers to access safe, affordable and nutritious food.

While many stakeholders are focused on the concept of food security, we believe measures based on volume alone are insufficient to ensure the health of future generations, and that nutrition security is equally important. We also believe consumers need information about food products so that they can make healthy choices about what they eat.

CHOICE plans to contribute further through the formal submission process on the green paper.

You can find out how to have your say at daff.gov.au.

ANGELA McDOUGALL



Credit card reform bingo

Following the introduction of credit card reforms in July, it seems banks are all going their own way on which ones to extend to existing cards.

The three key reforms that don't have to apply to cards issued before 1 July 2012 are a ban on over-limit fees (unless you have agreed to them), notification when you go over your credit limit, and directing repayments to the most expensive debt first.

NAB has applied all of these important reforms to existing cardholders, but other card providers are taking a piecemeal approach. St George and ANZ have elected only to direct repayment to the most expensive debt first. A CHOICE member has reported that CBA extended all of the new regulations when asked.

By contrast, 28 Degrees MasterCard is only including over-limit notifications and, worryingly, is also trying to encourage its customers to opt in to receive credit limit increase invitations by advising that "not all customers are aware of when they are eligible to apply for a higher credit limit. If you'd like us to let you know, you'll need to opt in to receive these invitations". In fact, 28 Degrees customers can apply for a credit limit increase through their online account access.

All this provides yet another reason to make sure that you've got the right plastic. Check out **betterbanking.choice.com.au** for an unbiased comparison of credit cards.

ELIZABETH
MCNESS



Gift and take

The federal government has decided not to regulate gift cards but to instead merely encourage industry to develop and promote best practice principles over the next three years.

We are continuing our investigation into gift card terms and conditions. If you've experienced problems with gift cards or prepaid credit cards, please contact us at money@choice.com.au to share your experience.

UTA MIHM

Did you know?

According to the Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council, a number of retailers allow flexibility with expired cards but sometimes store staff do not honour these promises. Try escalating complaints to head office if you have any problems.





Stepping up

The FitBit Ultra is a gadget that counts the steps you walk, stairs you climb, and calories you burn to help you design your exercise regime. Using the FitBit website, you can also track the food and water you take, activities and exercise you do as well as your weight, heart rate and glucose levels.

The combination of altimeter and accelerometer automatically

measures the number of stairs and steps taken with accuracy. However, you'll need to manually input other types of activities to properly track calories.

The simple and elegant set-up of the software is let down by a complex website with multiple tabs, although anyone who's used a fitness website will recognise the set-up, with dashboard and logging tools.

Like other food loggers it's labour-intensive to record all the detail and requires a great deal of discipline. A downside of this US-centric device is its lack of Australian food items, however we give a thumbs up to the social media connection, which can act as a motivational incentive.

The smartphone app is useful for recording activities, water and meals, though there's no way to directly link the device to your phone. The device has a stopwatch function that helps with recording activities without needing a watch or phone, although it's a shame it isn't waterproof for the swimmers among us.

Keeping things simple, a single button brings up an LED to show motivational messages that change daily. The display progresses through a number of single line updates such

as steps, calories, kilometres and time.

Its sleep tracker is fascinating, reporting on deep sleep and dreaming states when your body is moving.

The recharge mount plugs into your computer and wirelessly syncs to the mount, not requiring physical connection until it needs recharging. It lives up to the claim of five to seven days of battery life.

We were a little disappointed with the holster that attaches the FitBit to a belt and would prefer something a little more secure, as we lost one sample when walking with a backpack.

CHOICE verdict

This is definitely a useful device for walkers and runners. A lack of Australian content in food logging may be a deal-breaker for some, but there's no doubt it is a very handy product for self-assessment.

MATTHEW STEEN

FITBIT ULTRA
PRICE \$150
CONTACT www.fitbit.com



Permeate paranoia

You may have noticed a "permeate free" claim on your latest carton of milk. So what is permeate, and should you be avoiding it?

The composition of milk can vary throughout the year as a result of regional and seasonal factors and the breed of the cow. According to industry, most dairy manufacturers standardise the fat and protein levels of the milk collected to meet consumers' expectations of a product with consistent composition and taste all year round. One way of

doing this is to add or remove fat. Another way is to add permeate, which also makes milk less costly to produce.

Permeate is derived through ultra-filtration, a process used by many milk manufacturers to separate various components of milk – protein, lactose, vitamins and minerals. Permeate is the technical term for the lactose, vitamin and mineral components, and is sometimes regarded as waste as it's discarded in the production of



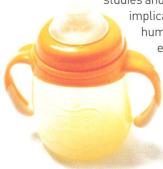
FDA nays BPA

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has banned the use of bisphenol A (BPA) in baby bottles and infant sippy cups.

The FDA's ruling comes just months after clearing BPA for use in general consumer products, as we reported in May (*CHOICE* May 2012, page 4). The move is said to be a formality – US manufacturers no longer use BPA in baby bottles – and was requested by the American Chemical Council to boost consumer confidence.

The FDA notes that recent studies provide cause for some concern about the potential effects of BPA on the brain, behaviour, and the prostate glands of foetuses, infants and children. However, it also acknowledges "substantial uncertainties" about the overall interpretation of these studies and their potential implications for human health effects of BPA exposure. Research is continuing.

KARINA BRAY



cheese. The Food Standards Code allows milk manufacturers to add or withdraw "milk components" as long as the total fat level remains at least 3.2% (for full-cream milk) and the protein at least three per cent (for any milk).

Permeate-free labelling appears to be a marketing move in response to concerns from some consumers about its use in milk, but there's no evidence to suggest you should avoid it for nutritional or safety reasons.

RACHEL CLEMONS

Ca-pooch-inos

Pet dogs may soon be allowed in outdoor dining areas in all states and territories in Australia. Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ), which has approved the proposal, will allow food regulation ministers around Australia to seek a review. If no review is sought, the decision will be gazetted and become law in Australia.

According to FSANZ, a risk assessment found that the risk of foodborne transmission of disease from pet dogs in outdoor settings to humans is very low to negligible.

Currently the Food Standards Code doesn't allow animals, other than assistance animals, in areas where food is handled. FSANZ chief executive officer Steve McCutcheon says that despite the proposal, business owners will still have the right to prohibit pet dogs from their premises.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



TPG taken to task

TPG customers who signed up to the company's so-called \$29.99 Unlimited ADSL2+ plan can now be set free from their contracts following intervention by the ACCC.

It turns out the plan was only available if you also signed up for a \$30 per month home-line rental, a detail left out of some advertisements published over a two-week period in September last year.

TPG must now pay \$2m in penalties, publish corrective notices, maintain a compliance program for three years and pay the ACCC's costs. Customers who would like to exit the plan should contact TPG.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Hard sell on software

Technology industry organisations are using familiar excuses as they defend large price differences in IT hardware and software products between the Australian and US markets. This follows CHOICE's submission to the parliamentary inquiry into IT pricing, which found price differences of about 50% across computer, software, gaming and music products.

Industry continues to cite factors such as retail rents, wages, logistic costs and GST as being responsible for Australia's higher prices. However, our research accounted for these factors and still concluded that price discrimination is primarily to blame.

The technology industry has also denied allegations of price discrimination by claiming that the costs of honouring Australian warranties are too high – an argument we reject. The Australian Consumer Law includes guarantees that a product will be of acceptable quality for a reasonable period of time with reference to factors such as the type of good and the price paid. Is it too much to ask that the products we buy actually work?

MADISON CARTWRIGHT

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If your experience is not good, then you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Statin the case for generic medicines

Thanks for alerting members to cheaper generic cholesterol-lowering statin drugs [CHOICE, August 2012] and the end of Lipitor's dominance as the most-prescribed statin in Australia.

If patients without a concession card change to a generic they'll save a lot. But all consumers who switch will save the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) even more – Australian *Doctor* reported in February that Lipitor cost the PBS about \$600m a year.

In April 2010, the ABC *National Interest* radio program revealed the subsidised price for Lipitor to patients in the UK was \$A3 and in New Zealand just \$A1.50. In Australia in 2010, the full cost of 30 Lipitor tablets (40mg) was \$79.05. Consumers here paid \$33.30 (concession holders \$5.40); the PBS paid the balance. The program indicated there were 20 million scripts per year at that time, hence the huge cost to the PBS.

In a follow-up program in May 2010 it was suggested that Australia pursue the New Zealand model of higher competition, which led to the low price in that country. In this approach, tenderers are advised that the

one with the lowest price will be able to supply the entire NZ market. Clearly, the PBS could do better.

Currently, Lipitor costs \$35.40 (\$5.80 concession). The PBS subsidy is still an incredible \$27.99 (\$5.79 concession). This money could be more sensibly spent elsewhere.

In the case of statins, the message is clear – buy a generic and save yourself and the government money. Trovas is a commonly available generic and costs \$20 (no cost to the PBS) and \$5.80 concession (balance paid by the PBS). An even cheaper generic, Atorvastatin Sandoz, is available for \$15 from outlets such as Chemist Warehouse.

Dennis McManus, Kangaloon, NSW

The real deal?

Your letter of the month, "Thumbs Down for 'Voucher Vultures'" [CHOICE July 2012], outlines the difficulties many have in trying to redeem daily deal vouchers. In contrast, I'd like to give a

Thumbs



Midway through a walk in the Kimberley the soles on both my wife's and my four-year-old boots, bought from Mountain Design, failed. Mountain Design tracked down the company that bought out the original Swiss firm which made our boots. They in turn provided us with two new pairs.

Trevor Kelly, East Fremantle, WA

Contact us!

Email us at

yoursay@choice.com.au

or write to Your Say,
CHOICE,

57 Carrington Road,
Marrickville, NSW 2204.

ringing endorsement to Scoopon, whose customer service is first class.

I purchased a week's accommodation in Thailand, only to be told by the hotel they were fully booked for the dates we required. I contacted Scoopon, and within a matter of hours was told a full refund would be arranged immediately.

Their policy, which guarantees an automatic refund in such circumstances (provided application is made within a certain time frame), is an excellent initiative that does much to reassure those who may be wary of daily deals.

Andrew Hillier, Maida Vale, WA



We purchased a Sunbeam Artista Coffee machine, but within several months it became faulty, so we returned it to Sunbeam. It was replaced with a new one four weeks later, only to fail again just inside warranty. We sent this back too, and a new Sunbeam Vita (the next model up) was mailed to us two days later. Thanks Sunbeam!

Neil Docherty, Umina Beach, NSW

"I was robbed at knife-point, losing my camera, mobile phone, credit cards, travel documents and all my money"

Flight from terror

LETTER OF THE MONTH

In June/July I travelled to South America, ending my five-week holiday in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where I'd hoped to spend a week. On the first day, at midday in a busy square, I was robbed at knife-point, losing my camera, mobile phone, credit cards, travel documents and all my money. Thankfully, my passport was locked in my case back at the hotel.

The thieves dragged me along, running a knife along my wrist, and finally cut my backpack off me. No-one stopped to help and I couldn't speak Portuguese to raise the alarm. The experience left me shaken, and after taking three hours for the report to be compiled by the Rio Tourist Police, I headed for the airport.



In February, we had a Breezair cooler installed. Unknown to us, we were entitled to a cash-back offer and were on holidays at the time when applications closed. With the encouragement of the local dealer, we put in a late application. We were delighted to receive our cheque.

**Glenn & Barbar Hilling,
Watsonia North, Vic**

I wanted to return early to Australia, where I'd feel safe and could receive help for my emotional state. The hotel was not willing to refund my cash payment for accommodation for the week ahead, even though I hadn't even used the room and was without credit cards or money. I subsequently placed a claim for the loss through my insurer, CGU Travel Insurance, on my return.

My scheduled return flights had been pre-booked for the following week. On arrival at the airport by taxi with money lent to me by a Scottish tourist (who had also helped translate Portuguese for me at the tourist police station), LAN Airlines put me on the first flight out of Rio, bound for Santiago. I slept at Santiago Airport that same evening and boarded the next Qantas flight to Sydney the following day. The only challenge that having no money presented was in transferring from Sydney International Airport to the Domestic Airport to catch the last Virgin Australia flight to Canberra. It was late evening when a security guard helped me out halfway between airports.

All three airlines were very helpful, not charging extra for the unscheduled change in flights. Qantas provided access to the American VIP lounge at Santiago Airport and Virgin a food voucher on arrival at Sydney Airport.

Unfortunately, CGU Travel Insurance are requesting proof of ownership for the loss of contents from my backpack and have not yet acknowledged the receipt of my claim, lodged electronically a week ago.

I'd like to warn those who might find themselves in similar circumstances that travel insurance may not cover loss of cash or unused prepaid accommodation, or reimburse you for items stolen when proof of ownership cannot be provided. You never know how good your insurance cover is until you have to claim.

Diana Hunt, Canberra, ACT

CHOICE SAYS *Travel insurance can be spotty when it comes to restrictions and exclusions. However, Diana should forward whatever evidence she can provide to back up her story to CGU – in particular paperwork from the Rio Tourist Police.*

CGU told CHOICE that its policy is to always ask for proof of ownership. This can include a receipt or warranty form or in some cases even a photo of you using the item. A spokesperson also told us its policies do not provide cover for theft of cash, and said CGU recommends the use of pre-paid debit cards for this reason. CGU confirmed that providing a police report, which Diana has since done, is of assistance when making a claim.



Are you being served?

How do Australia's bricks-and-mortar retailers stack up when it comes to customer service? **Kate Browne** shadow shops our top 10

Many of our well-known retail and department stores now compete not only with each other but also with online stores. And when it comes to the retail landscape, the experts CHOICE spoke to say the in-store experience can still go a long way to developing customer loyalty and

therefore spending. The vital element? Great customer service.

Despite this, a recent American Express global customer service survey found Australian consumers believe service standards have continued to decline over the past three years. Further, two-thirds of those surveyed said they'd abandoned a purchase in store because of poor service.

Service, please

Dr Paul Harrison, chair of consumer behaviour and advertising at Deakin University, says bricks-and-mortar shopping is an "emotional and cultural experience" that largely hinges on a high level of customer service. He believes that while the total in-store experience is important, it's the positive experience customers have with staff in particular that resonates.

"Customers like being sold to but it's got to be in the right way, and you need a skilled salesperson to do that. Unfortunately, these days they are the rarest creature around."

Steven Di Pietro, executive director of mystery shopping company Service Integrity, agrees customer service can give bricks-and-mortar stores a significant edge but believes salespeople rarely have the skills or suffer from a lack of training.

Are they right? CHOICE decided to find out (see left).

The CHOICE shadow shop

We sent Emma, Alexander, Gloria and Kathryn to 10 of Australia's biggest retailers at a variety of locations in Sydney at different times of day over a two-week period. Upon entering the store, each shadow shopper noted whether they were greeted by staff or offered any help. They then asked for a specific item costing about \$100, depending on the store. If our shopper wasn't approached or offered help they tried to find a staff member to

ask for assistance. They rated that staff member on helpfulness and product knowledge, as well as noting any other efforts to close the sale such as offering a price reduction or added extras. Each shopper then gave each store an overall thumbs up or down. For stores that accept change-of-mind returns (see *Many Happy Returns*, page 18) our shoppers bought the item and later returned it, again noting how the experience went.



IMAGE: STOCK PHOTO

Department stores

MYER

MY STORE? SURE?

Three of our shoppers struggled to find any sales assistants at all initially. Kathryn and Emma both waited almost 15 minutes in the kitchen section without being offered help, despite staff eventually appearing nearby. But Alexander was approached almost immediately in the suburban store he visited, and received reasonably good service.

In terms of product knowledge, none of our shoppers felt the staff were helpful. When Emma asked for a recommendation on a two-slice toaster the sales assistant recommended a four-slice model because it was on sale, even though it was more expensive than the type she wanted.

Returns Three shoppers had no problems with returns, however when Kathryn attempted to return her item she stood at the register for several minutes while the sales assistant continued to do paperwork without acknowledging her. Nearby, another staff member was unpacking stock and didn't offer any help. Kathryn then waited while these staff members had a conversation about lunch breaks before finally serving her.

DAVID JONES

WAS. IS. ALWAYS - INCONSISTENT

David Jones' marketing suggests it's a cut above the rest when it comes to the customer experience, with top-hatted doormen in the Sydney city store and a sumptuous layout on the ground floor. But our shoppers found their customer service experiences patchy at best.

Kathryn visited one store at lunchtime and waited almost 15 minutes without being offered help, despite two sales assistants standing at the register having a conversation and no other customers around. She walked past the sales assistants trying to make eye contact and was ignored before having to talk over them to ask for help. While the assistant was friendly, she couldn't provide information on products beyond

colours and which were on sale.

Emma spent 10 minutes wandering the store she visited before having to ask for help. The assistant she found couldn't provide much assistance, telling her that most of the brands were the same as they were all made in China.

Alexander and Gloria fared better. Alexander was offered help straight away, and while Gloria was initially ignored, once she asked for help the sales assistant was friendly.

None of the sales assistants were particularly knowledgeable about their products, offering suggestions based on colour or popularity or reading the features off the box.

Returns All four had a positive experience with returns – these were quick, with no fuss.

Discount department stores

Australia's major discount retailers, Target, Big W and Kmart, all claim to provide everyday items at a reasonable cost. While the shopping experience here promises to be vastly different compared with department stores, customer service is still important.

Target.

ON TARGET - MOSTLY

Overall our shoppers had a positive experience at Target, finding it easy to help themselves or track down a staffer.

All the staff approached were friendly, although none was knowledgeable about the products. All four shoppers commented on how quick and easy it was to pay for their items and be on their way.

Returns With a dedicated service desk, all four shoppers processed their returns with a minimum of fuss.

BIG W

BIG W, BIG EFFORT

Emma, Kathryn and Alexander reported that Big W was a straightforward affair, where helping yourself was standard. But Gloria found a sales assistant who went out of her way to help despite admitting she didn't know much about the products in question.

Returns All shadow shoppers reported that the return process was simple, fast and hassle-free.

Kmart

KMART OK, BUT LONELY

Our shoppers commented on how few floor staff there were in the stores they visited, as well as the number of self-service checkouts. Emma described her store as being like a "supermarket for homewares and clothes. I managed to buy the kettle without any interaction with another person." Gloria managed to find a staff member who was helpful, while Alexander described his experience as being a "no-worries operation. Kmart did what I'd expected and did it well".

Returns All shoppers reported a no-fuss experience. ▶

Franchises

Harvey Norman

SLOW, HARVEY, SLOW!

All the Harvey Norman stores our shadow shoppers visited were mostly empty of customers but had plenty of staff on the floor. Despite this, none was greeted when they walked into the store.

After wandering around for some time, three of our four shoppers had to ask for help. Kathryn was eventually approached by a staff member after waiting a short while.

When it came to product knowledge, there was a wide range of customer experiences. Gloria was given some helpful information on the various kinds of phones available and offered a couple of dollars off two items when she asked for a discount. However, Emma's sales assistant had very little product knowledge – he simply read features off the box – and didn't ask her any questions to work out which phone would best suit her needs.

Kathryn was approached by a salesperson whom she says was quite pushy. While he was very keen to offer discounts and close the sale, when she asked about the different brands he claimed they're all "pretty much the same, love".

Returns Don't accept change-of-mind returns (see below).

THE GOOD GUYS

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Kathryn was greeted as soon as she entered a Good Guys store and asked if she needed help. The salesperson had a high level of product knowledge and asked her a lot of questions to ascertain which product might suit her best.

Alexander says he was mostly ignored when he arrived in the store; eventually someone appeared and offered to help. The sales assistant was friendly but her advice was based on the theory that the more you pay, the better the product.

For Gloria, the experience couldn't have been worse. After being ignored for five minutes she went searching for help. She found a salesperson, told him she was looking for a cheap white plastic kettle and asked if the brand she liked would be suitable. He told her he couldn't say, and then suggested she buy a \$10 extended warranty with her \$23 kettle. [As CHOICE has often highlighted, extended warranties are a costly and unnecessary extra as consumers have the same protections for free under the Australian Consumer Law.] He then kept pushed her towards an \$84 model, telling her it was less likely to rust. When Gloria mentioned the brand she originally wanted to buy had been recommended by CHOICE, he claimed "they all do the same thing – boil water".

Returns Don't accept change-of-mind returns (see right).

Specialty retailers

dick smith

TALK TO THE HAND

The service experienced by our shadow shoppers at Dick Smith was an equal split between good and woeful.

Gloria and Kathryn visited suburban stores and were offered assistance almost immediately upon entering. In both instances the sales assistants had good product knowledge and weren't too pushy.

On the other hand, Emma was totally ignored by two staff members who stood in the empty store she visited. However, when she finally asked for help the sales assistant displayed good product knowledge and made some helpful recommendations.

As for Alexander, even after asking for help, he got none. "I wore my techno-idiot face and wandered around, to no avail. I could have stood for hours gazing helplessly at the gadgets as store staff stood by in little groups, thumbing their smartphones and chatting away. I asked about cordless phones and was directed to that section, but no-one came with me to assist."

Returns Don't accept change-of-mind returns (see below).

Many happy returns

Of the 10 stores we shadow-shopped, four – Harvey Norman, Dick Smith, JB Hi-Fi and The Good Guys – do not accept change-of-mind returns. While this is legal under Australian Consumer Law, many stores do accept returns as a result of customers changing their mind, provided the product and are intact.

A Harvey Norman spokesperson told CHOICE that the franchise believes its sales staff are skilled enough to ensure each customer is completely happy with their purchase before buying, so a change-of-mind returns policy isn't necessary. Dick Smith, JB Hi-Fi and The Good Guys didn't provide CHOICE with any defence of their policy.



HIGHS AND LOWS AT JB

Emma and Gloria rated their JB in-store experience as excellent – both were offered help quickly, and the staff were knowledgeable about the products and happy to make recommendations.

When Kathryn visited one of JB's stores she found seven staff and few customers. She waited for more than 10 minutes for someone to offer some help before finally asking. The sales assistant was OK but struggled to identify her particular needs and match them to a product. "The only person who approached me in store

was a security guard who wanted to check my bag," she says.

"If store staff had ever been instructed to look out for customers who were clearly in need of assistance, they must have forgotten that bit of training," says Alexander. "I was directed to cordless phones by an employee who appeared to have plenty of time to help – but didn't."

Returns Don't accept change-of-mind returns (see below left).



THE WELCOMING WAREHOUSE

Bunnings, winner of the People's Choice Award for Best Bricks & Mortar Retailer in the 2011 CHOICE Awards, also rated well with our shadow shoppers, with all four reporting a good experience in the warehouses they visited.

Despite the size of the stores most of our shoppers found a staff member easily, even when there were plenty of customers about. And all reported friendly, helpful and knowledgeable

staff. "Bunnings seems to have a well-maintained policy of making sure store staff know the layout and have some product expertise," says Alexander.

Returns Our shoppers reported returns were quick and painless.

Death of the department store?

Australia's big two department stores frequently receive harsh criticism when it comes to customer service. Steven Di Pietro believes the criticism is valid. "David Jones markets itself as a high-level experience, but in reality the service may not be great," he says. He believes smaller specialty stores will perform best of the bricks-and-mortar shops in the future.

Paul Harrison disagrees, saying there is a future for smart department stores that incorporate a mix of online and in-store experiences. "People like these brands and want to continue to use them. As humans we don't like change and it can take a lot to change our habits." ■



Frequent flying groceries

Coles and Woolworths say they're committed to sourcing their private label products from Australia. But as **Elise Dalley** discovers, this isn't the whole story



Australians are predicted to spend \$85.9bn on groceries this financial year, with private label sales expected to account for just over one-quarter of this amount – double what we spent on home-brand products five years ago. While dry grocery items and chilled packaged food categories have proven themselves the strongest private label performers over this time, raising supermarket profits but also question marks over where they come from. While a commitment to Australian products is evident in the fresh produce sections of the big two supermarkets, this loyalty is not so easy to find in some other aisles.

Coles told CHOICE it has an Australia-first sourcing policy that extends to all private label products, of which it claims 90% are locally made or grown. According to the 2011 *All About Coles* report, “we will always try to source products locally and only import if Australian supply is insufficient to meet our customers’ needs”.

Similarly, the Woolworths Sustainable Strategy for 2007-15 claims Woolies remains “committed to our long-standing policy of giving preference to Australian vendors who can meet our supply requirements” and promises preferential trading terms to local vendors for private label goods. It claims 90% of its Homebrand products are from Australia.

To put these claims to the test, CHOICE looked at more than 360 products across popular grocery categories, including cereals, biscuits,

snacks, tinned goods and frozen packaged food, matching private label products to their market leader equivalents. Of products we surveyed, just 55% of Coles’ products and 38% of Woolworths products were locally made or grown, compared with 92% per cent of market leader groceries. We included any product that was made in Australia or included Australian-grown ingredients. But these products may still include other ingredients from overseas.

92%

Market leader products surveyed by CHOICE were made or grown locally

55%

Surveyed Coles products were made or grown locally

38%

Surveyed Woolworths products were made or grown locally

Origin matters

Research by Roy Morgan in 2009 suggests Aussie shoppers rate local products highly, with 89% saying it is important the food they buy is Australian and 82% saying it's important this food is packaged in Australia. Similarly, 83% of CHOICE members surveyed in 2011 told us that buying Australian-owned is important to them.

While Coles and Woolies claim their buyers only look to overseas markets when local suppliers are unable to meet demand, farmers tell a different story.

George Anderson* has been a vegetable farmer all his life. If you've ever purchased a basket of fresh veggies from Woolworths, chances are you've probably eaten produce from his Tasmanian farm. If you haven't, your chances are fast diminishing. In more than 30 years of farming, Anderson says this year are particularly dire.

Anderson estimates up to 50,000 tonnes of potatoes and a further 20,000 tonnes of other vegetables, including carrots and onions, will go to waste in Tasmania this year. He says this is due to increasing numbers of imports arriving on our shores.

"The situation we're in now is probably the worst I've ever seen," he told CHOICE. "In the past, if you had a bad year, you could balance it out the next year. We can't say that now. There's far more [produce] in Australia than we can actually sell because of all the imports coming in.

"Farming in Australia is going backwards by the week. You've got very few major processors left here, so the product has to come from overseas. If things keep going the way they are, people won't have a choice when it comes to frozen and tinned goods because there won't be any Australian produce left to buy."

Woolworths affirms its commitment to the future of rural Australia on its website, but our analysis of its processed fruit and vegetables – the kind you find in tins or in the freezer section – suggests otherwise. Of the nine frozen vegetable categories we looked at, 13 of the 14 Woolworths private label products were sourced

including corn, broccoli and peas – a move Coles says has been well received by customers.

By invite only

"You can't expect the big two to be benevolent organisations, but there are extremely significant farms in this country that aren't even being given the opportunity to bid for their contracts," says William Churchill, spokesperson for Ausveg, the Australian farming industry body. "I know some of the biggest bean growers in this country weren't even aware of [private label] contracts."

Nineteen of [Woolworths'] 21 tinned fruit and vegetable products came from overseas

internationally. Similarly, 19 of their 21 tinned fruit and vegetable products came from overseas.

While the frozen potato products from market leaders we examined were made in Australia, the same can't be said for Woolworths branded products. Frozen chips across both the Select and Homebrand tiers, as well as Woolies' potato wedges are processed in the Netherlands, some 16,000km away.

Coles also sources some frozen and processed vegetables from overseas, but this year has moved towards Australian produce across a range of frozen goods,

Woolworths says its tender process for private label goods is by invitation only – something farmers believe is less than ideal. "We don't find out – it is not a public document," says Mitch Ball, a Tasmanian farmer who supplies Woolworths with fresh produce year round. "The challenge for the government is working out how they can level the playing field. We're as good as producers anywhere else in the world yet we are going broke."

Churchill agrees more must be done to connect private label supply contracts to Australian growers and processors. "I'd love to see [tenders] advertised on the web so they could be promoted to farmers."

Up to standard?

Dr Mark Zirnsak is the director at the justice and international mission unit of the Uniting Church of Australia. In his capacity as a ▶

What CHOICE wants

CHOICE knows that country of origin (CoO) labelling is one of the biggest consumer frustrations when it comes to food labelling. We've long called on governments around the country to clear up with confusion caused by the multitude of different terms currently used on packaging.

In our July 2011 members' survey, close to 90% of more than 300 respondents said it was important to know

the origin of the food they eat, with two-thirds rating it as very important.

Do you look for country of origin labelling on any foods in particular? Do you find it difficult to make informed purchases? And which terms are most confusing or unhelpful – "made in Australia from local and imported ingredients" or "packaged in Australia"? We'd like to hear your thoughts – please email us at investigation@choice.com.au.



NETHERLANDS

For Coles and Woolworths, Holland means potatoes. Coles Smart Buy frozen chips and all Woolworths' frozen chips and potato wedges are freighted in from the land of windmills and tulips.

social justice advocate, he investigates complaints about food processing plants overseas.

Woolworths and Coles both have an audit system in place to ensure overseas manufacturers maintain workplace standards in line with the UN's International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which calls for just and favourable working conditions. However, Zirnsak argues announced visits and lack of information about sourcing locations indicate a lack of transparency.

"It's great when a supermarket chain has a strong code, but it needs to be backed by proper auditing, which would include unannounced inspections and talking to workers without management being present, which is currently not the case with many companies," he says.

Laboured labelling

Of products made in Australia, it's not always easy to determine exactly where the ingredients came from. A large proportion of the products we surveyed that were made in Australia included ingredients of unidentified origin.

Of our sample of 100 market leader products, 42% specified they were packaged locally with some or all ingredients from overseas. Of the Coles products, 63% were labelled as packaged in Australia from a combination of local and/or imported ingredients, while 71% of Woolies products were labelled as packed locally but including ingredients of overseas origin.

So what does the term "made in Australia" even mean? Right now, in order to use these words, the product must have undergone substantial transformation and 50% of processing costs here. Labels such as "packed in Australia from an imported ingredient" don't really explain much at all, except that an ingredient from a mystery country was repackaged in an Australian factory.

"Made in Australia from imported and local ingredients" doesn't quite give you the whole story," says Churchill. (CHOICE agrees this grey area needs tightening – see choice.com.au/countryoforigin.)

In July, Australian Greens leader Christine Milne announced the Accurate Country of Origin Labelling for Food Bill

GERMANY

German representation in our supermarket aisles is all about chocolate. The majority of private label hot, cooking and spreadable chocolate products we bought, as well as snack-size copycats of popular chocolate bars such as Bounty, Kit Kat and Milky Way, all come from Germany.

ITALY

Some things you would expect – pasta and tomato sauce – and many of the things you wouldn't – tinned legumes, cereal flakes and baked beans – are shipped in by Coles and Woolworths from a country famous for gastronomy.

in an attempt to protect both Australian consumers and farmers from this type of misleading labelling. Milne argues the bill provides clear food-specific country-of-origin labelling to allow customers to better understand where the produce they buy comes from and ensure a fair and transparent market for local growers (see page 8 for more). For a full list of product categories we looked at, see choice.com.au/supermarketcountryoforigin. ■

FIJI

For the big two, Fiji is the first stop for private label biscuits and happens to be home to Woolworths Homebrand's very own take on the classic Aussie chocolate biscuit, the Tim Tam.

NEW ZEALAND

Coles prefers NZ for a number of its Smart Buy frozen vegetable categories, and our Kiwi neighbours also manufacture its private label cereal products, including breakfast cereals and muesli bars.



Point scoring

Do hotel loyalty reward programs really stack up in your favour? **Reshma Prasad** investigates

Vying for your repeat business, many hotels offer loyalty programs. As a member, you can accrue points through hotel stays and redeem them for room upgrades, dining and car hire discounts, air miles, merchandise and almost everything in between at participating hotels and with partners worldwide. It all sounds good, but are you really being rewarded for your loyalty? CHOICE looked into hotel club memberships, comparing the loyalty programs of a few major players, to see how much bang for your buck you really get.

Getting to the point

Signing up to loyalty or rewards programs – either free or for a fee – is relatively easy. However, calculating how you earn and redeem points is another matter altogether, and there are as many models as there are membership programs. All but one (IHG Priority Privilege) of the hotel loyalty programs we looked at use the traditional points-based system to reward members, but each calculates how many rewards points you receive differently.

HotelClub.com member rewards, for instance, are calculated on the

Schemes we looked at

- Hotelclub.com
- InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) Priority Privilege
- IHG Priority Club Rewards
- Le Club Accorhotels
- Hilton HHonors, and
- Starwood Preferred Guest

total cost of a confirmed booking. The rewards you earn from a booking are calculated at a percentage that ranges from four to seven per cent, depending on your membership level. Alternatively, Le Club Accorhotels allocates one to two points for every euro or 1.4 points for every US dollar you spend at select participating hotels.

Where the crucial differences lie, however, is in how points are converted into useable rewards. And this is where things ▶

can get confusing. For example, each HotelClub reward accumulated is worth \$US1. While the point-to-dollar ratio in this particular scheme is clear, with some programs the reimbursement ratio is skewed. When it comes time to redeem your points with the Le Club loyalty scheme, for every 2000 points you accrue you receive a voucher to the value of either €40 or \$US60.

In order to compare these two programs to determine whether one is better value than the other, we calculated how many dollars you'd have to spend in order to accumulate a dollar's worth of value in return as a reward. Le Club members have to spend \$US23.80 for a \$US1 reward, whereas HotelClub members need to spend between \$US14.29 and \$US25 for a \$US1 reward, depending on their membership level.

To make matters more confusing, InterContinental's Priority Privilege program doesn't even use a points accrual

scheme, instead offering members one-off concession certificates as well as ongoing discounts for an annual membership fee of \$299. But globetrotters may find Priority Privilege restrictive as it only allows members to claim discounts at select participating hotels in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu. InterContinental's Priority Club Rewards program, on the other hand, uses the more traditional points-based rewards model, is recognised at participating outlets worldwide and has no joining fee.

The perks

Every now and then throughout the year, many loyalty program members are given the chance to earn bonus points. Special member deals may allow you to double or triple your points, or club memberships may offer generous rewards points – say 3000 points – for a booking that may normally only attract 500 points.

Some loyalty programs, however, like to reward their members further by giving them the option to select an earning and reward program that allows them to maximise their earnings. Hilton's

HHonors, for example, allows members to take charge of their earning power. HHonors Double Dip Earnings Style gives its members a choice of three earning styles, allowing members to earn five or 10 base points, depending on your hotel of choice, and either additional HHonors points (two-and-a-half or five bonus points per \$US1) or air miles (one air mile per US dollar, up to 500 air miles), provided you have an existing frequent flyer account. With this program, members may change their earning style at any time.

And, if you're a few points short of a room upgrade for example, some programs such as HHonors Point Purchase Program offer you the option to buy points, while others, such as Starwood Preferred Guest (SPG)'s Cash & Points, allow you to use a combination of points and cash to get you over the line.

The lurks

Further differences between the hotel loyalty programs are highlighted where redeeming the points you've earned is concerned. Two of the programs we came across enforce a minimum point requirement before you can redeem them. HotelClub members can start redeeming rewards as soon as they've accumulated a minimum of one member reward in their account. Le Club will issue you with vouchers once you've accumulated 2000 points. By contrast, Priority Club, SPG and HHonors don't enforce a minimum point requirement before you can access rewards.

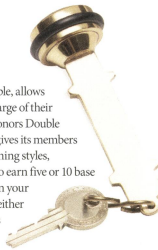
If you're using your points to redeem a free night, it pays to know that they can have substantially more or less buying power depending on whether you're intending to use them during low or high season. SPG members will need to have between 3000 (if staying in a standard category one room) and 35,000 points (if staying in a standard category seven room during high season). By comparison, HHonors members can redeem between 25,000 and 40,000 points for most standard rooms per night at participating Hilton

\$23.80

The amount Le Club members have to spend to accumulate a (US) dollar's worth of value in reward

\$14.29

Minimum amount HotelClub members have to spend to accumulate a (US) dollar's worth of value in reward



hotels. However, there are other standard rooms that may only set you back between 7500 and 12,500 points per night.

Keep in mind, too, that the points you accrue in any given year aren't automatically rolled over to the next year. For the programs we looked at, points are usually only valid for 12 or 24 months, depending on the scheme you select. In order for hotel clubs to roll your points over, you'll need to stay at one of their

points at a cost of \$US5, while HHonors members can transfer a minimum of 10,000 points to another member at a total cost of \$US25, or \$US0.0025 per point – this fee no longer applies after you've transferred 200,000 points in one year. SPG allows its members to transfer points to one another, provided both parties have been an SPG member for at least 30 days and that you and the person who is receiving the points share the same street address.

In comparison, Le Club gives 10,000 points while HHonors and Priority Club earn just 2000 and 4000 air miles respectively, after the transfer. (You're looking at about 50,000 points to fly from Sydney to London.) Transfers from loyalty programs into airline schemes aren't always instantaneous, and it may take a couple of weeks before your airline account is credited.

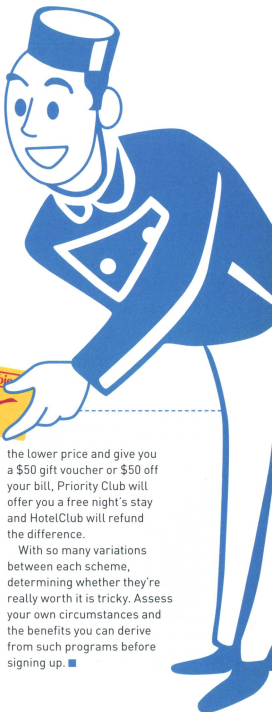
Another point of difference that sets one loyalty program apart from another is whether they allow you to transfer points to friends and family

participating hotels at least once during that period.

Another point of difference that sets one loyalty program apart from another is whether they allow you to transfer points to friends and family or another member. With Le Club Accorhotels, while points are non-transferable, if you use your points to buy hotel vouchers, these can then be passed on to family and friends to use at participating hotels. Similarly, HotelClub's non-transferable points can be used to purchase travel or accommodation, which can then be passed on to a friend or family. Conversely, Priority Club, HHonors and SPG will only allow you to transfer points to another member. Priority Club members can transfer points in increments of 1000

Additionally, SPG points transfers are free and there are no minimum or maximum restrictions on the amounts that can be transferred between accounts.

Under some loyalty schemes, members are also able to transfer points to a number of affiliate partners – with air miles programs being one of the most popular. In order to determine which loyalty programs offer the best conversion rate when you transfer points, we looked at transferring 20,000 points from Le Club SPG, HHonors and Priority Club accounts into the British Airways Executive Club program. A 20,000 points transfer from the SPG account into this airline program resulted in 25,000 air miles.



Is there really any point?

If an online search turns up a cheaper room than what is being offered on the websites of some hotel guest loyalty schemes or associated hotels, it could be worth bringing this to the attention of the program of which you're a member. All the loyalty programs offer a "best rate guarantee", however the terms and conditions under this policy vary between programs.

To take advantage of the best

rate guarantee offered by a loyalty program, most of the schemes we've looked at require you to report the lower price you've seen within 24 hours of making a booking. You'll need to ensure that the third-party rates are for the same hotel, same dates, same room type, same sales conditions and so on. Once your claim has been verified, SPG will offer you either 2000 Starpoints or a 10% discount on the lower price, Le Club will offer you 10% off the lower price, HHonors will match

the lower price and give you a \$50 gift voucher or \$50 off your bill, Priority Club will offer you a free night's stay and HotelClub will refund the difference.

With so many variations between each scheme, determining whether they're really worth it is tricky. Assess your own circumstances and the benefits you can derive from such programs before signing up. ■

Is fresh best?

How do premium imported beers shape up against the locally brewed versions? **Elise Dalley** and a team of experts find out

When you order an imported beer off the menu at your local restaurant, it would seem reasonable to attribute the premium price to the cost of shipping Peroni from Italy, Stella from Belgium or Grolsch from a canal-side beer hall in Holland. But this isn't always the case.

International beer giant SABMiller, which took control of the formerly Australian-owned Foster's in December last year, brews a handful of European beers right here in Australia, including Grolsch and Peroni Nastro, both of which are brewed at the Bluetongue Brewery on the NSW Central Coast. Danish Carlsberg and French Kronenbourg 1664 are brewed under licence by Foster's. Lion also has a share of the market, responsible for the local brewing of Dutch brand Heineken and German Beck's.

Head brewer at the Bluetongue Brewery, Paul Feasey, says there are many factors beyond country of origin that can influence the flavour of a beer. Each franchised brew comes with its own brand manual outlining the intrinsic properties of the beer, right down to equipment, raw

materials and even the composition of the water used at the brewery.

"We do everything we possibly can that is in line with the brands in their home countries," says Feasey – including shipping in Italian maize to brew the local Peroni Nastro and European hops to ensure Grolsch remains true to its Dutch heritage. In order to uphold his commitment to authentic flavour, Feasey tastes the beers every day and sends monthly samples to the home breweries for feedback.

To welcome the beginning of spring, CHOICE enlisted a panel of seven beer experts who brew, buy or imbibe for a living to bring imported European beers face to face with their brewed-locally-under-licence counterparts. See below for the results.

Fresh is best

"Age makes a big difference," says Feasey, who argues little can be done to prevent flavour degrading over time. "If you drank a fresh Peroni here today and then flew to Italy and drank a fresh Peroni in Rome, they would taste identical. The problem is, a container can take eight weeks to get here and spend three to six weeks at the docks in temperatures

that can reach 70-80°C at certain times of the year."

Panellist Ian Watson told CHOICE that beer starts deteriorating shortly after bottling and tastes best at the seven-day mark, although Feasey believes ideal consumption time can be stretched out to three months. The Australian industry standard requires that all beers brewed for consumption here be labelled with a best-before date of nine months after the date of bottling, although Feasey says a six-month shelf life would be preferable to get more fresh beer into the market.

Our taste test

Imported brands and their locally brewed counterparts were purchased from local bottle shops around Sydney.

Experts were presented with unlabelled pairs of local and imported beers and asked to arrive at a score out of 20 for each, taking into account appearance, aroma, flavour and technical composition.

We bought beers that were on the shelf, whatever the best before date, to replicate what is generally available to the consumer at any one point in time.

98.08

Litres of beer consumed per head in 2011 in Australia

Who won the bout? Our experts vote



MEET THE EXPERTS

Ian Kingham ▶

National merchandise manager, ALH Group / Woolworths



▶ Richard Adamson

Director,
Young Henrys
Brewing Company



▶ Ian Watson

Brewer, Murray's
Craft Brewing Co.



Neal Cameron ▶

Head brewer, The
Australian Brewery



Sarah Turner ▶

Restaurant and
events manager,
4 Pines Brewing
Company



▶ Matt Donelan

Owner,
St Peters Brewery



David Lipman ▶

Publisher and
managing director,
Beer & Brewer Media

A parallel world

Our experts also sampled two bottles of Corona, with best-before dates within two weeks of each other, brewed by AB-InBev in Mexico. The only difference: one arrived on our shores courtesy of the official importer via the traditional route, while the other was parallel imported via non-traditional channels (see *CHOICE*, June 2012). In this case, five out of seven experts preferred the traditionally imported product, although experts said they were overall a well-matched pair and that parallel imports can offer consumers competitive prices and fresh characteristics if handled correctly.



WHAT TO BUY

Home grown

If you like the taste of European beer but don't like the idea of a globe-trotting brew, you should have no hesitation about purchasing a beer brewed locally under licence. Of the seven beers we compared, there was no unanimously preferred brew, with local brands on par with their authentic counterparts.

Of the local brews, NSW-produced **Grolsch** achieved the highest score. Six experts preferred the local brew's lively full flavour over the import, which they said was "stale" and "hard to love".

The **Carlsberg** and **Kronenbourg 1664** local brews also scored better than their imported siblings, although in the case of Carlsberg only just. Panellists commended the local Carlsberg for its solid characteristics and good drinkability, while Australian Kronenbourg was commended for its balanced flavours and ability to display the qualities typical of a European lager.

Lion's **Heineken** scored just ahead of the Dutch version, and there was an overall consensus that the two were the closest match of the day.

The real deal

If you think lasagne tastes best in Italy and chocolate best in Belgium, you're no doubt an advocate for authenticity. So what did our experts think of the authentic brews of these two countries? In our test, five of our seven experts preferred the imported **Peroni Nastro**, despite it being closer to its best-before date than its local counterpart.

AB-InBev's **Stella Artois** and Lion's **Beck's** both split the panel, so if you want to bring a bit of Belgium to your backyard or beer hall spirit to your BBQ, let your tastebuds be your guide. ■





Portion distortion

Food portion sizes are increasing, and so are our waistlines. **Rachel Clemons** investigates the connection

Food portion sizes are increasing. In the US in the 1950s, McDonald's offered just one size of soft drink – 7oz (about 210mL). It now has 12, 16, 21 and 32oz (950mL) offerings. And French fries and hamburgers are now two to five times larger than those originally offered.

Portions are also growing at home, where the sizes of our bowls and glasses have steadily increased and the surface area of the average dinner plate has increased 36% since 1960.

Why does this matter? Put simply, the bigger the portion, the more you eat and the more kilojoules you consume. Between 1983/85 and 1995, energy (kJ) intake increased significantly for both adults and children in Australia. Without an equivalent increase in energy expenditure, increases in energy intake can result in significant weight gain over time.

The latest food and nutrition publication from the government's Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that we have one of the highest rates of obesity in the world – 23% of children and 61% of adults are

The bigger the portion, the more you eat and the more kilojoules you consume

overweight or obese. So any factor contributing to increasing energy intakes and rising obesity rates needs to be taken very seriously.

Portions vs servings

Manufacturers and the food industry recommend serving sizes for their food (shown on the nutrition information panel or posted on websites), and these are used to determine the percentage daily intake (%DI) figures for kilojoules and other nutrients that some manufacturers choose to display on

food labels. Portion size, on the other hand, is the amount of food you actually serve up for yourself or purchase to eat.

In theory you should be able to use these manufacturer serving recommendations to monitor and

control how much you're eating. However, with large packets that contain multiple servings – including some foods that are packaged into what appear to be individual portions – following the recommended serving sizes isn't necessarily as sensible or straightforward as it sounds.

In the US, serving sizes are regulated by its Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but these have been criticised as out of date and unrealistic. In many instances they're smaller than the amounts typically eaten, with critics

arguing as a result they understate the kilojoules, sodium and saturated fat people will actually consume.

In Australia, it's up to the manufacturer to determine the serving sizes, and this system is also flawed. Serving sizes are often inconsistent between comparable products, and even within the same brand, and some are quite simply unrealistic – see page 31 for some examples.

And as in the US, for some food categories such as cereal products, serving sizes are lower than the typical reported amounts consumed by adult Australians and those recommended in the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*. It's no surprise that studies have found people generally can't correctly estimate the number of servings in a package.

Hidden costs of supersizing

How much we eat is often dictated by the portion size – the size of the packet we buy or the dish we order – rather than the recommended serving sizes. As food containers, restaurant portions and drink bottles have become increasingly supersized, the gap between servings and portions has become really out of whack. And these supersized portions are having a big impact on the amount of kilojoules we're consuming.

Supersizing, or value adding, is a technique used by food companies to increase profits. It encourages you to spend a little extra to purchase larger portion sizes and leaves you feeling you've snagged a good deal. A US study looked at this practice, and found that more often than not there are hidden nutritional costs. Upgrading from a small to a medium-sized bag of

Beat the supersizers

To help reduce portion distortion and control kilojoule intake:

- **Eat from smaller plates and bowls** and use smaller spoons for serving and eating. One US study found that switching from a 10- to a 12-inch dinner plate (equivalent to switching from a 25cm to 30cm plate) caused people to consume 22% more kilojoules at a meal. Australian research has shown that reducing portion sizes is an effective technique for weight loss.
- **Drink from tall, narrow glasses** rather than short, wide glasses. Studies have found that people pour up to 77% more into short, wide glasses.

- **Pre-portion your foods.** Don't eat directly from a box, bag or container that contains multiple servings of a food such as a family-size bag of chips or a tub of ice-cream. It's hard to keep track of how much you're eating so it's easy to overeat.
- **Don't have second helpings.**
- **Choose the smallest container/cup/plate** when buying takeaways. They usually contain more than enough food (and kilojoules).
- **Don't be tempted by value meals** or supersized/king-sized portions. They may be good value for money, but they're often bad bargains in terms of kilojoules.

popcorn at the movies, for example, cost 71 more cents, but also an additional 500 calories (2090kJ) – in other words, a 23% increase in price bought 125% more kilojoules. And ordering a supersize Coke rather than the small

version at McDonald's cost 58% more but came with 173% more kilojoules.

A visit to our local shops turned up similar examples. A Cherry Ripe twin pack cost 11% more and gave 54% more kilojoules than the regular 52g bar. And a foot-long Italian Meatball sub from Subway cost 50% more than the six-inch version but provided 100% more kilojoules. ▶



A new front

Recommended serving sizes can be variable and unrealistic, so they shouldn't form the basis of a front-of-pack labelling system for our food products. CHOICE believes an interpretive system, which translates the numerical information already available in the nutrition information panel using colours, symbols, words or ratings – for example traffic lights – is more useful. Based on consistent measures of products, such as 100g or 100mL, this system will help consumers compare products at a glance and identify the healthier options more easily.



Eating with your eyes

Supersizing would be less of a problem if we had more control over how much we eat. A research department at Cornell University in the US has conducted numerous studies confirming people tend to judge that they've finished eating when their bowl or the pack is empty, rather than when they feel full.

In one study, 54 diners were served soup in bowls, half of which were being imperceptibly filled through hidden tubing under the table as their contents were consumed. People eating soup from the "bottomless" bowls ate 73% more, but didn't believe they had consumed more, nor did they perceive themselves as feeling any fuller than those eating from the normal bowls.

In another study, 158 movie-goers were randomly given a medium or

large container of free popcorn that was either fresh or stale (two weeks old). Those given fresh popcorn ate 45.3% more popcorn when it was given to them in large containers. But the influence of container size was so powerful that even when the popcorn was disliked (because it was stale),

people still ate 33.6% more when eating from a large container than a medium-size one.

Research has also shown that when people use large bowls, plates and serving utensils, they serve themselves – and consume – more food (and therefore more kilojoules). In one study, 85

nutrition experts were asked to serve themselves a bowl of ice-cream. Researchers gave out a variety of bowl and scoop sizes. Those with larger bowls served themselves 31% more ice-cream without being aware of it; when they used a large serving spoon, they dished 14.5% more into their bowls.

So whether it's food we serve ourselves or prepacked food we buy, being aware of portion size is crucial. ■

23%
of Australian children and
61%
of adults are overweight
or obese

Going in hard against soft drinks

In an attempt to curb alarming levels of obesity and diabetes in New York City, Mayor Michael Bloomberg recently proposed that the size of cups, bottles and cans for sugary soft drinks sold through food service establishments be limited to 16oz (about 475mL) – in the US soft

drinks are sold in cups up to 64oz [1.9L], which contain up to 3263kJ and 54 teaspoons of sugar. Bloomberg cited the increase in portion sizes of sugary soft drinks and the association between sugary drinks and long-term weight gain and an increased risk of heart disease as reasons for the move.



Unrealistic serving sizes



A 225g tub of **Bulla Yoghurt Crunch** contains 2.25 servings (conveniently for the manufacturer, one single serving is just under 600kJ, the generally accepted reasonable energy for a snack)



A 300mL bottle of **Golden Circle Healthy Life Probiotic** juice contains 1.5 servings, although people can reasonably consume the whole bottle in a single sitting!



A serving of **Domino's** and **Pizza Hut** pizza from their regular range is just one slice; we believe most people would eat at least two or more

Same product, different serving sizes



A **Mars Bar** serving is 18g, 36g or 53g, depending on the pack size



A serving of **Smith's Chips Original** is 19g, 27g or 45g, depending on the pack size



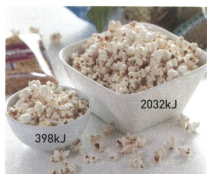
Comparable products, different serving sizes



A serving of **Woolworths Home Brand Quick Oats** (30g) versus a serving of **Freedom Foods Quick Oats** (60g)



A serving of **McCain Healthy Choice Chinese Chicken and Cashews** (280g) versus a serving of **McCain Healthy Choice Plus Honey Stirfry Chicken** (420g)



A serving of **Coles Organic Sweet and Salty Popcorn** (20g) versus a serving of **Coles Butter Microwave Popcorn** (100g)

Protein power

There's a protein supplement for just about everyone these days – but just how useful are they? **Karina Bray** finds out

In recent years there's been a growing awareness of the importance of dietary protein – especially for weight loss, but also for the benefits of increased muscle

mass. No longer the sole preserve of body builders, protein supplements are popping up everywhere, with marketers targeting people who want to lose weight, older adults who need to

retain muscle mass and athletes who want to build muscle and recover quickly from exercise. But do you really need a special supplement, or is a healthy diet enough?

WEIGHT LOSS

Visit a pharmacy, health food store or supermarket and you'll find a huge range of protein powders, bars and snacks aimed at people trying to lose weight. Increasing the amount of protein in your diet can help with weight loss because it keeps you feeling fuller and less hungry for longer, and kilojoule for kilojoule it requires more energy than fat or carbohydrate to process and store in the body. Having adequate protein when reducing kilojoule intake also helps prevent the loss of muscle mass, especially when combined with resistance training, and this also contributes to weight control because muscle tissue consumes energy. But do you need supplements?

According to nutritionist Dr Rosemary Stanton, when it comes to weight loss the evidence is that only kilojoules count. However, she acknowledges that "some

people have found it easier to reduce their kilojoule intake by omitting foods high in carbohydrate or fat – and that leaves protein".

With some studies raising concerns about the long-term health effects of a diet high in red meat, protein shakes, snacks and supplements have been marketed as a better source of protein than red meat. However, Stanton argues that this is "an expensive way to get extra protein, and with no evidence that such diets are of any special benefit for long-term weight loss, it seems a fairly useless exercise".

Bottom line

Most Australians get plenty of protein in their diet and don't need protein supplements to achieve weight loss. A diet featuring vegetables, fruit, whole grains, low-fat dairy and lean protein is consistently linked with successful weight control. When it comes to snacking, try replacing high sugar and/or high-fat manufactured snack foods with whole foods such as low-fat plain yoghurt, a handful of nuts and seeds or a hard-boiled egg.



OLDER PEOPLE

It's increasingly recognised that elderly people need more protein than younger adults. As you age, you metabolise amino acids differently and need higher doses to stimulate muscle protein synthesis. Inadequate protein causes bone (osteopaenia and osteoporosis) and muscle (sarcopaenia – see below) wastage, and also affects immunity and wound healing.

The most recent Nutrient Reference Values (NRV) for Australia and New Zealand (2006) recommend an increase in daily protein intake from the age of 70. For men, this is an increase from 0.84 to 1.07g of protein per kilogram of body weight, and for women from 0.75 to 0.94g/kg. The most recent National Nutrition Survey (albeit from 1995) found adults aged 65+ consume an average of 73g of protein per day, which is likely to be in line with the NRV recommendations (81g and 57g for the average-weight male and female in this age group respectively). But the optimal protein intake for adults over 50 may be higher than this, with recent research suggesting the recommended intake may not be adequate to preserve muscle, and that levels of 1-1.3g/kg would meet the protein needs of older adults while avoiding problems related to too much protein.

0.8 - 1.0g/kg

Recommended daily protein intake for most adults

1.0 - 1.3g/kg

Recommended daily protein intake for older adults

So while the protein needs of older adults increase, engaging in less physical activity and a change in perceptions of taste and smell may mean their appetite, and therefore food intake, is decreased. Food preferences and cooking habits may also change, and unless a conscious effort is made to ensure there is adequate protein, people may not get enough to meet their needs. Marketers promote protein supplements as a way for older people to ensure they meet their needs.

But does all this mean you should take a protein supplement when you hit 50? Probably not, says Milena Katz, spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia, as most people get plenty of protein in their diet. However, she recommends those in this age group review their diet with the help



Cereal with yoghurt
14g protein

of a dietitian when they retire. "People change their eating habits as they get older, and particularly when they retire and radically change their lifestyle."

Katz also points out that taking supplements isn't as good as eating whole foods, because there are other nutritional benefits in whole foods. The supplements are also quite expensive. However, for some people – especially frail, elderly people who have little interest in eating – they are the best option. Your doctor can give you a referral to a dietitian, and you may be eligible for a Medicare rebate.

Bottom line

While most people can get enough protein from a balanced diet, consulting a dietitian when you retire can help provide advice or at least peace of mind. ▶

WHAT'S SARCOPAENIA?

Sarcopaenia (Greek, from *sarco*, flesh + *paenia*, loss) is the loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength that occurs with advancing age. It affects five to 50% of people aged 60 and older, varying according to age and how sarcopaenia is defined. Loss of muscle strength can impact heavily upon quality of life, affecting mobility, increasing the risk of falls

and fractures, making daily living difficult and ultimately resulting in a loss of independence and increased risk of death. Sarcopaenia isn't inevitable and is reversible, and a program of strength training combined with protein consumption can be used to successfully maintain and rebuild muscle mass. The Centre for Strong Medicine at Balmain

Hospital in inner Sydney provides exercise-based medicine programs for older adults. The exercise programs, which are done at home or the centre, are targeted at various conditions affecting older adults, including sarcopaenia. The centre's dietitians advocate eating a high-protein meal or snack containing 20g of protein

within 30 minutes of finishing training to maximise the benefits of training on muscle growth. This can be achieved with conventional foods, such as lean meats, poultry and fish, dairy products or eggs. However, the centre does offer its clients a ready-to-drink protein supplement after exercise for a quick and convenient protein hit.



Yoghurt
12g protein

1.2g/kg

Recommended daily
protein intake for most
moderate-intensity
endurance athletes

**1.4 -
1.7g/kg**

Recommended daily protein
intake for power athletes
(weightlifting, football)
and elite endurance
athletes

Almonds
6.5g protein

and the protein helps prevent muscle tissue breakdown and stimulates muscle tissue synthesis, which is further assisted by the insulin resulting from the carbohydrate.

Timing and amount

The optimal amount of protein for a post-workout snack is thought to be about 20g of high-quality protein (from meat, eggs or dairy) – any more than this will not be used. Protein supplements marketed for post-exercise recovery may contain the required elements, but there's a growing body of evidence in favour of flavoured low-fat milk, which has protein, fluid, electrolytes and carbohydrate, and is cheap, effective and readily available. Whey protein found in milk is considered an ideal choice because it's high in the muscle-building amino acid leucine, and is digested quickly so it's available when muscle building is at its peak. Flavoured yoghurt, smoothies and breakfast cereal with milk are also recommended. However, protein supplement drinks and bars may be a convenient alternative for some people – you can keep one in your gym bag or take one when travelling.

There's a large body of evidence showing that consuming protein immediately after training (within an hour) enhances muscles' uptake of amino acids from the protein, and therefore maximum benefit can be gained. However, muscle repair continues for 24 hours so regular consumption of protein thereafter is also important.

Bottom line

Protein supplements aren't necessary for recreational athletes who are likely to get plenty of protein from their normal diet. Supplements may be also be more expensive per gram of protein than other sources such as milk, eggs or meat, and depending upon how they're used may provide more protein than can be effectively used by the body. ■

ATHLETES

Protein supplements are often promoted for athletes – from your average gym junkie to professionals and elite-level sportsmen and women. While it's true athletes have higher protein needs than more-sedentary people, whether they really need a supplement is debatable. Protein is said to have three key benefits for athletes: providing speed and stamina, aiding recovery and building muscle.

Building strength

Athletes attempting to gain muscle size and power need more protein at the beginning of an intensive strength-training program, but the muscles adapt to the new regime and subsequently less protein is required so that they only need slightly more than a typical active person. And because people who exercise heavily tend to have a greater appetite, their protein requirements are generally met without the need for a special high-protein diet or supplements – even including body builders.

Performance

Some pre-workout protein supplements claim to help increase speed and stamina, but is there any evidence for this? A 2010 review of studies found consuming protein before or during exercise doesn't help people go faster, but it does help with endurance. However, in studies that found this, the protein drink contained more kilojoules than the drinks it was compared with, so it could have been the extra energy rather than the protein that made the difference. More studies comparing preparations with similar energy value are needed.

Recovery

After training or competing, athletes need to refuel, rehydrate and repair muscle. This is particularly important for those who need to perform again soon after, but it also helps alleviate muscle soreness after a hard workout. Sweetened liquid protein drinks are ideal because the carbohydrate helps restore glycogen to muscles, the liquid helps rehydrate

The question of contraception

Just because you started on the pill doesn't mean you have to stay on it, **Zoya Sheftalovich** writes

In the June issue of *CHOICE* in 1963, *CHOICE* heralded the arrival of the oral contraceptive pill. "The 'pill' – one of the most effective methods of birth control – is now available in Australia on the prescription of a doctor," we wrote.

For the princely sum of 15 shillings, we offered our members a copy of *The Consumers' Union Report on Family Planning*, "prepared for the use solely of doctors, clinics, social workers and

Health and Family Planning Australia.

"What suits someone at 18 is likely to be different to what suits someone who is postnatal and/or in her 40s [or] 50s.

"There's a lack of awareness and information about newer options. People may discount methods and

In practice, the pill is less effective than a large number of products now available

married couples who are seeking such information on the advice of their doctors".

Seven years later, in *CHOICE* August 1970, we argued that "[the pill] is effective – more effective than any other common method of contraception – [and] easy to use."

Half a century has passed since the pill hit our shores, yet it is still the most popular method of contraception. But what was true then is not true now. In practice, the pill is less effective than a large number of products now available on the market – the implant, IUDs and the injection all have higher efficacy rates. So why aren't more people using alternatives to the pill?

"Women tend to stick to the same method they start with, but their contraceptive needs are likely to change over the course of their reproductive life," says Dr Deborah Bateson, medical director of Family Planning NSW and spokesperson for Sexual

think they're unsuitable when in fact they may be suitable."

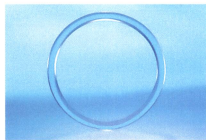
In a report on current contraceptive management in Australian general practice published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in July this year, the authors wrote: "While contraception and reproductive health are core aspects of general practice, in Australia little is known about contraceptive management by GPs, what occurs during a contraceptive consultation, and how this affects contraceptive use and reproductive health outcomes."

So what are some of the reversible contraceptive options available in Australia, and which one is right for you? ►



Don't forget

There have been advances in short-term contraception, with an injectable contraceptive, a variety of pills and a vaginal ring on the market. These methods, however, rely on the individual to remember to use them, and so have reduced efficacy rates with typical use.



Vaginal ring

Name Contraceptive hormone vaginal ring, marketed in Australia as NuvaRing.

Method A soft, plastic ring is inserted by a woman into her vagina. Once inserted, it releases low doses of oestrogen and progestogen, the same hormones as in the combined oral contraceptive.

Price About \$25 per ring.

Use Once inserted, the ring remains in place for three weeks, and must then be replaced, either in one week after a withdrawal bleed, or immediately to avoid menstruation. The ring is prescribed by a GP.

"It's an alternative delivery system to the pill," says Bateson. "The benefit is you don't have to remember to take a pill every day. It appears relatively beneficial for cycle control, and it can be useful for women who have breakthrough bleeding with the pill. The downside is it's not on the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS), so cost may be an issue."

One advantage is that, unlike the pill, vomiting and diarrhoea don't reduce effectiveness as the hormones aren't absorbed in the intestinal tract.

Efficacy
91%
with typical use

99.7%
with perfect use

Injection

Name Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate injection, marketed in Australia as Depo-Provera or the generic Depo-Ralovera.

Method A synthetic hormone similar to progesterone is injected by a doctor or nurse every 12 weeks.

Price Each injection costs about \$26-30.

Use It is injected into the buttock or upper arm, and takes seven days to become effective. It's not immediately reversible, and women can take up to two years to return to full fertility.

Efficacy
94%
with typical use

99.8%
with perfect use

For women under the age of 18 or over 45, the contraceptive injection is not a first choice due to certain side effects. However, Bateson says it can be a useful option for some women.

"The injection does have an effect on bone density. But for women in their mid-reproductive years, that reduction in bone density is easily reversible once they stop having the injection. One advantage for some women is after using the injection for one year, 50% of women have no bleeding, and that percentage increases over time."

The pill

Name Combined and progestogen-only (mini) oral contraceptive pills, marketed under various brand names in Australia.

Method Most combined pill packs contain 21 active pills and seven inactive placebo pills, which allow women to menstruate. Each mini pill pack contains 28 active pills. There's leeway of up to 24 hours if a combination pill is missed, or just three for a progestogen-only pill, after which time a woman may no longer be protected against pregnancy.

Price From \$3 to \$24 per month.

The contraceptive pill is the most common form of contraception used in Australia. "We've got a lot of data on [the pill]," says Bateson. "It can be useful for controlling acne, managing heavy periods and decreasing period pain. Sometimes the pill



Efficacy
91%
with typical use

99.7%
with perfect use

can control headaches that some women get with their periods."

One of the benefits of the combined contraceptive pill is the ability it gives women to control their menstrual cycle by skipping the placebo pills.

"We now have plenty of data to show that it's safe to have continuous pill use for up to one year. Some women will get breakthrough bleeding with prolonged use, so we sometimes advise three-month cycling."

Gastric upsets and certain medication can impact on the effectiveness of the pill, as can human error.

The long haul

Aside from abstinence and sterilisation, the most effective forms of contraception are long-acting reversible contraception (LARC). Professor of general practice at Monash University Danielle Mazza says that according to one national survey, 50% of women in Australia experience an unplanned pregnancy, despite the fact that 70% of women use contraception. The solution, she says, is more women using LARCs, "so that we can start to address the quite high rates of unplanned pregnancy in this country".

Human error has less impact on LARCs, compared with other forms of contraception such as the pill, ring and injection. Dr Philip Goldstone, medical director of Marie Stopes International Australia, a global sexual and reproductive health service provider, says: "There's no chance of user failure. [Aside from interaction with certain medication] there's nothing a person can do to make that contraception less reliable."

IUD

Name Levonorgestrel IUD (hormonal IUD), sold in Australia as Mirena.

Method A small piece of T-shaped plastic is inserted into the uterus. Fine threads attached to it protrude through the cervix, making removal easier. It slowly releases the progestogen-like hormone levonorgestrel for up to five years. Fertility returns very quickly upon removal.

Price Available on the PBS, it costs about \$35 for one IUD.

Use It lasts for up to five years, and must be prescribed, inserted and removed by a doctor.

IUDs suffer from an image problem, Goldstone says. "Historically, IUDs have had a bad reputation, which is completely out-of-date thinking with today's IUDs."

Efficacy
99.8%
with typical and perfect use

Implant

Name Etonogestrel implant (implant), marketed as Implanon NXT in Australia.

Method A 4cm-long flexible plastic rod is inserted directly under the skin of a woman's arm. The implant contains a synthetic hormone resembling progesterone, which is released continuously into the bloodstream for three years. Fertility returns very quickly upon removal.

Price Subsidised by the PBS, it costs about \$35 for one implant.

Use Lasts three years; must be prescribed, inserted and removed by a GP.

The implant is the most effective contraceptive option available. In fact, it's even more effective than some permanent contraception such as vasectomies, female tubal occlusions and ligations.

Although implants came onto the Australian market in 2001, last year the old Implanon was replaced by Implanon NXT. "The difference lies in the applicator, which is designed to minimise deep insertions leading to difficult and

potentially risky removals," says Bateson.

"On insertion there is no incision. You just need a little local anaesthetic in the arm, there's a slight sting, and some women have a bit of bruising. When we remove it we need to make a 2mm incision. There's a very small risk of scarring, but more so in people who have a tendency to scar."

Some women will experience an unacceptable change to their menstrual cycle, but Bateson says you should trial the implant for three months and discuss issues with your doctor before considering removal.

Efficacy
99.95%
with typical and perfect use

Bateson agrees. "The latest IUDs are a far cry from earlier prototypes. There is a very low risk of pelvic infection which is mainly confined to the first 20 days after insertion. There's no evidence of an increased risk of subsequent infertility for women using an IUD."

The insertion procedure is generally done by a GP or gynaecologist with experience in insertion, and is relatively brief and painless.

"We get women to take a painkiller beforehand, and most find it's OK," says Bateson. "There can be cramping pain when the IUD goes in, and women who haven't had children or who've had C-sections may have more cramping discomfort. While more commonly used by women who've completed their family or are spacing pregnancies, they are also useful for younger, [childless] women. They're

useful for women with heavy menstrual bleeding."

Like the pill, Mirena can be used to treat excessive menstrual bleeding or protect against endometrial hyperplasia (excessive growth of the lining of the womb). As with the implant, the menstrual cycle is altered but women usually end up with lighter periods.

There are some downsides. In five per cent of cases, women may experience an unexpected expulsion of the device. But you can check the device is still in place by feeling for the threads.

A new, mini Mirena may soon be available in Australia. "We've been trialling it," says Bateson. "It's smaller, lasts up to three years and should be available around 2014. It might be useful for younger women with smaller uteruses, or those who've experienced side effects from other IUDs." ▶

Old faithfuls

Despite these newer forms of contraception, the **diaphragm** is still favoured by some women, despite its relative lack of efficacy. With perfect use, it is 94% effective. With typical use (that is, taking into account the chance of human error), that figure drops to 88%.



Efficacy
88%
with typical use

94%
with perfect use

Female condoms can be used by those with latex allergies and allow women to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). But at about \$3 each they're relatively expensive and their typical-use efficacy rate is low (79%), so they should be used in conjunction with more effective contraception to prevent pregnancy.

Withdrawal and fertility awareness (timing of the cycle, temperature-taking) are also less-effective forms of contraception. Although with perfect use their efficacy can be high, it drops significantly with typical use – just 78% for withdrawal, and 76% for fertility awareness.

Efficacy
76%
for fertility
awareness with
typical use

Popular in the past, **copper IUDs** are also still available on the market. "They have a valuable place in the contraceptive arsenal for women requiring a highly effective, long-acting, hormone-free method," says Bateson.

Goldstone says work on **male contraceptives** is ongoing. "In terms of temporary methods, most involve blocking sperm, but in the process of that they block testosterone that then needs to be replaced, and men don't appear to be very receptive to that idea." But there is a potential male contraceptive pill in the works: see page 5 for more.



Efficacy
82%
with typical use

98%
with perfect use

For men, temporary contraception is limited to condoms.

Male condoms have an efficacy rate of 82% with typical use, and 98% with perfect use. Their high failure rate is mainly attributed to incorrect use, or condom failure. They provide protection from STIs and can be used with another, more-effective contraceptive method.



It's an emergency

Emergency contraception is now available over the counter – useful in cases when contraception is forgotten or may have failed. Unfortunately, many women may not be aware of this option. "While almost all Australian women in a recent survey had heard of the emergency contraceptive pill, fewer than half were aware it is available without a prescription at the pharmacy," says Bateson.

The most common emergency contraceptive method is a single 1.5mg dose of **levonorgestrel** taken up to five days after unprotected intercourse, although its effectiveness may decrease on the fifth day.

"The emergency contraceptive pill is safe and there are no contra-indications as a result of taking it," says Mazza.

Copper IUDs may also be used for emergency contraception up to five days after unprotected intercourse. ■



Taken for a ride

Are some private car parks pulling a fast one? **Andy Kollmorgen** investigates an outbreak of unauthorised fines

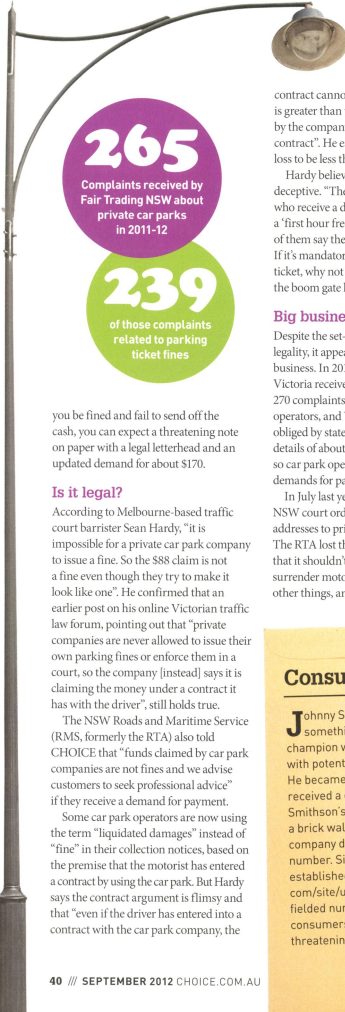
For at least the past five years, some private car park operators have been slapping motorists with bogus "fines" and threatening legal action if they don't pay up. In the cases CHOICE has heard about, the operator gives no clear indication that a parking ticket is needed, and then sticks a \$66 or \$88 notice on vehicles that don't display one.

The confusing part for drivers is that the parking is generally free for an hour or two and there are no boom gates or ticket machines at the entrance – but you still need to display a ticket. Should ▶

An uncaring approach

Russell De Leon has felt the full brunt of the private car park ticketing regime. He told CHOICE that the loading dock for his business is next to a Care Park (see page 40) in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta.

"I frequently use my car to load items or deliver items for work, however I still managed to get fined for leaving my car in an area supposedly owned and operated by Care Park," he says. "I recently received an envelope containing backdated fines since 2010 to the tune of \$1584. Having contacted Care Park multiple times to organise an arrangement, I've been repeatedly told that their operators are busy and they'll return my call. I've had no return calls for weeks now but have been sent statements demanding immediate payment or legal action will be taken."



265

Complaints received by
Fair Trading NSW about
private car parks
in 2011-12

239

of those complaints
related to parking
ticket fines

you be fined and fail to send off the cash, you can expect a threatening note on paper with a legal letterhead and an updated demand for about \$170.

Is it legal?

According to Melbourne-based traffic court barrister Sean Hardy, "it is impossible for a private car park company to issue a fine. So the \$88 claim is not a fine even though they try to make it look like one". He confirmed that an earlier post on his online Victorian traffic law forum, pointing out that "private companies are never allowed to issue their own parking fines or enforce them in a court, so the company [instead] says it is claiming the money under a contract it has with the driver", still holds true.

The NSW Roads and Maritime Service (RMS, formerly the RTA) also told CHOICE that "funds claimed by car park companies are not fines and we advise customers to seek professional advice" if they receive a demand for payment.

Some car park operators are now using the term "liquidated damages" instead of "fine" in their collection notices, based on the premise that the motorist has entered a contract by using the car park. But Hardy says the contract argument is flimsy and that "even if the driver has entered into a contract with the car park company, the

contract cannot lawfully claim a sum that is greater than the reasonable loss suffered by the company as a result of the breach of contract". He estimates any reasonable loss to be less than \$10.

Hardy believes the car park tactics are deceptive. "The number of consumers who receive a demand after parking at a 'first hour free' car park is high, and all of them say they are misled by the signs. If it's mandatory for all drivers to display a ticket, why not have the ticket machine at the boom gate like legitimate car parks?"

Big business

Despite the set-up being of questionable legality, it appears to be doing brisk business. In 2010-11, Consumer Affairs Victoria received 1615 inquiries and 270 complaints about private car park operators, and VicRoads was reportedly obliged by state courts to provide the details of about 70,000 car registrations so car park operators could mail out demands for payment.

In July last year, the RTA appealed a NSW court order to provide names and addresses to private operator Care Park. The RTA lost the appeal but protested that it shouldn't have been forced to surrender motorist details since, among other things, any legal action attempted

by Care Park "would be doomed to fail".

Still, the game goes on. In July this year one of the biggest operators, Australian National Car Parks (ANCP), was in court in Sydney attempting to obtain motorists' names and addresses from the RMS. And earlier this year, in May, the RMS mailed a letter to ANCP and Care Park fine recipients warning that the agency had been ordered by the court to release their names and addresses. The letter provided a list of consumer protection agencies.

Demand-for-payment notices threatening legal action have been sent out on behalf of ANCP under the name of Sydney-based solicitor Michael Roper – see A Tangled Web, right. One letter we've seen adds an additional \$85 fee to the original \$88 payment for "liquidated damages".

It is CHOICE's view that the almost-doubling of the parking charge and the threat of legal action are excessive.

Lawyers on board

In 2010, Hong Lim, a member of Victoria's state parliament representing Melbourne's Clayton District, called for an investigation into the involvement of law firms in the private car park collection process, describing their tactics as part of "an old-fashioned shakedown for those

Consumer engagement

Johnny Smithson has become something of a consumer champion when it comes to dealing with potentially bogus parking fines. He became involved after a friend received a demand for payment and Smithson's efforts to clear it up hit a brick wall, not least because the company didn't even have a phone number. Since then he has established a website, sites.google.com/site/unfairfines/, and says he's fielded numerous emails from consumers who have received threatening collection letters.

Smithson's investigation has led him to believe that some private car park operations are now focusing more on debt collection than parking fees and teaming up with opportunistic lawyers in order to scare consumers into paying fines that may be illegitimate but which they'll pay to avoid going to court.

"Most people freak out and pay up when they get a letter from a lawyer, whether it's legitimate or not," he says. "That's just what the people behind these operations are counting on."

A tangled web

Are car parks, collection agencies and lawyers in on it together? CHOICE has confirmed that the phone number on an October 2011 letter from Michael Roper to a motorist currently leads to Australian Recovery and Collections (ARC). We were told by ARC that we "must be looking at an old notice" and were given Roper's current phone number. We also obtained ASIC documents showing that ANCP and ARC currently have the same registered business address.

The documents also show that ANCP's two company directors, Paul Gyles and Victor Nudler, were directors of ARC from its foundation in February 2011 to July 2011 and that Gyles Holdings and Nudler Holdings still own 70% of ARC's shares. ANCP and Roper did not return our calls.

who are unaware of their rights". He called on the state attorney-general to investigate one firm, Parke Lawyers, to prevent people becoming victims of lawyers who prey on the "weak and ignorant". He said that the firm, acting on behalf of Care Park, was threatening legal action unless the original \$88 plus a \$77 legal fee were paid. A spokesperson for Lim's office told us that legal action in such cases is unlikely, although the office continues to hear from concerned and confused citizens. (Parke Lawyers represented Care Park in their case against the RTA.)

"One woman recently came in with a fine notice from [the Melbourne suburb of] Preston," Hong Lim's spokesperson said. "It turned out she'd never been to Preston. We called the car park operator and the fine was dropped, but when we pressed for more information they just hung up. If you challenge these operators they drop off straightaway. We generally tell our constituents to ignore the notices, but we still haven't been able to shut these businesses down."

The process of shutting them down, or at least reining them in, may be underway. In April this year, the Victorian Supreme Court ordered Ace Parking and its officers, Kevin John English and James John English, to stop using misleading tactics and fined the company \$14,500. The tactics, which were found to violate the Fair Trading Act, included issuing fines and threatening legal action without legal authority, mimicking the look and language of legitimate council and government notices, and harassing people to pay.

What can you do?

The best way to respond is open to question at this point. Hardy believes Victorian motorists should ignore demands for payment.

"I've never seen them sue a Victorian consumer. I have seen them sue consumers in NSW, but the case usually settles without a hearing because one or both parties realise it is uneconomical to maintain a court case over \$88."

In July this year, ANCP took three

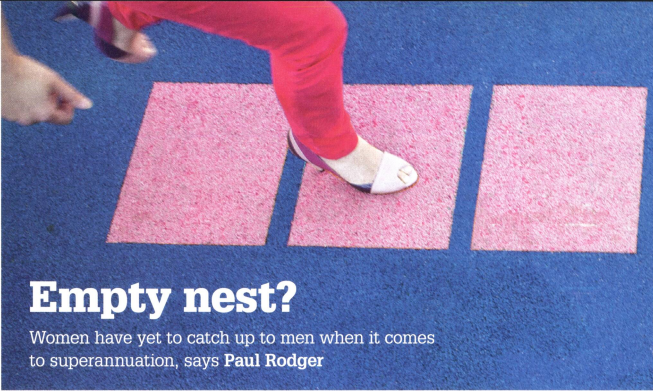
people to court in the Sydney suburb of Bankstown. Fair Trading NSW, which told us that 239 of the 265 private car park complaints it received in 2011-12 related to fines, says NSW consumers should contact car park operators to dispute fines and, if not satisfied, contact Fair Trading on 13 32 20 or lodge a complaint at fairtrading.nsw.gov.au.

A spokesperson for NSW Fair Trading said consumer regulators are monitoring a number of car park operators and that Consumer Affairs Victoria "is leading work on a national approach to this matter".

ANCP will only accept payment disputes in writing or by fax and asks for any evidence you may be able to provide relating to the fine.

One consumer who has pursued a thorough investigation of his own (see opposite) says that because many of these car parks are attached to shops, consumers should contact the businesses that the car park appears to serve (if there is one), since the ticketing system is ostensibly designed to prevent motorists who aren't patronising the business from parking there. ■





Empty nest?

Women have yet to catch up to men when it comes to superannuation, says **Paul Rodger**

When it comes to retirement savings, men still rule the roost. And when it comes to nest eggs, despite the advances in equitable pay, women face a number of hurdles if they want to grow their superannuation independently.

According to ASIC, Australian women about to leave the workforce in 2007 had, on average, \$35,300 less super than men. One reason is that men continue to work longer hours than women, who spend more time out of the workforce, or work reduced hours, because they're more likely than men to spend time caring for children. An Australian government report on workforce participation released in April 2012 shows 46.1% of men work full-time compared to only 25% of women. The disruptions caused to women's careers, and the fact that many re-enter the workforce in a part-time capacity only, means they generally earn less in the long run and therefore less super.

This discrepancy needn't be all bad, says Sarah Riegelhuth, co-founder and director of private wealth management firm Wealth Enhancers. She believes women who generate super independently and follow prudent financial advice can set

aside enough to retire on. The same goes for women in stable relationships, where both they and their partner are capable of accruing sufficient wealth over a lifetime. However, problems arise in the event of a relationship breakdown. "If there are children involved, and the woman looking after them is incapable of going back to work for some time, she's going to have problems with her superannuation," Riegelhuth says.

Don't leave it too late

Women who shun financial advice until later in life and rely on their partner for their financial security are vulnerable to financial risks. An AMP poll of financial planners conducted in 2011 revealed almost half believe the primary barrier to women seeking financial advice is the emphasis placed on their partner or spouse's finances.

"In some cases, women take care of the day-to-day financial management of their household but aren't involved in making major financial decisions with their

partner," says Chris Kirby, technical manager at AMP.

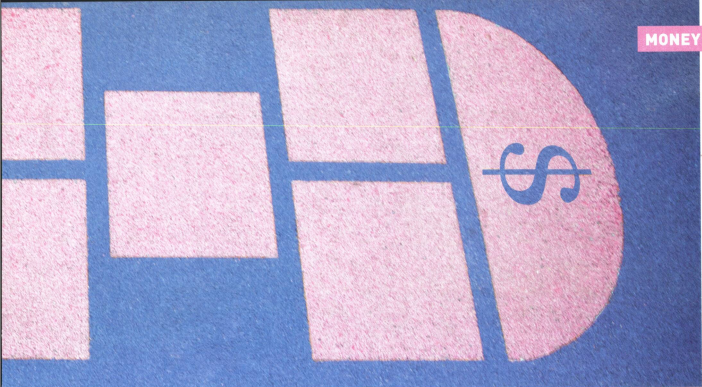
"Many women wait until they're older to seek financial advice, by which time the path to financial security has become more difficult."

It's a point that's also been made by Delia Rickard, a former ASIC consumer protection expert who is now the deputy chair of the ACCC. "Women are great with doing the family budget and making money stretch to meet their kids' needs," she says, "but they're not good at thinking about their long-term financial security."

Rickard says accumulating enough super to last through retirement is essential for women, especially given their longer life expectancy. "It's really important that we [women] start to think early on about saving for our retirement and doing some of that long-term planning ourselves."

Rickard recommends women set aside enough money to cover basics, ensure there are funds available in case of an emergency, and make sure insurance is in place where needed. If the opportunity is there, she suggests making voluntary contributions towards super.

**Women
who shun financial
advice until later in
life are vulnerable
to financial
risks**



Targeted advice

Women have much to gain by planning for their future, says Susan Jackson of the Women's Financial Network. "There's an enormous amount of evidence to show there will be the biggest transference of wealth to women in the next 20 years because they're independently wealthy, living longer so inheriting wealth, and there isn't the same salary imbalance."

Jackson believes the financial services sector has to change its ways if women are to reach their potential. "There needs to be more financial commentators creating what I call a more modern dialogue," she says. "It's not about offering women different financial products; it's about changing the way the financial services industry speaks to them." Part of the problem is that the financial services industry has traditionally been dominated by men. Jackson thinks women will better understand how to manage their finances once the industry learns a few pointers about how to address their needs.

Finding a financial adviser who understands the challenges women face is one important step towards gaining financial independence. Finding out what support mechanisms are in place can also help. Initiatives such as spousal contributions and government

co-contributions can help women bridge the super gap (see below).

Riegelhuth offers this simple advice that applies equally to both men and women: "The earlier you can start

planning your future, the better off you'll be. If you can sacrifice a little bit of your salary to superannuation from a young age, you'll find a little bit equals a lot over a long period." ■

Supercharge your super

Take advantage of the Spouse

Contribution scheme. It offers a tax offset on contributions made by a working spouse to their non-working or low-income-earning partner.

Read up on family assistance benefits. If you're a primary carer who earned less than \$150,000 in taxable income in the previous financial year, you could be eligible for paid parental leave. Alternatively, you could be eligible for the baby bonus if your family income in the six months after you have your child is less than \$75,000.

Investigate the Super

Co-contribution scheme. It's a government initiative designed to assist low- and middle-income earners boost their savings. The scheme offers to match any personal super contributions at 50c on the dollar up to \$500.

Consolidate your super funds.

If you've changed jobs a few times, chances are you've had several super funds. Take the time to find lost superannuation and consolidate it into one manageable plan so you don't pay multiple management fees.

Salary sacrifice. Asking your employer to pay part of your pre-tax salary into your superannuation fund can be an effective way to increase super balances.

Consider life insurance and income protection insurance – the earlier in life the better. Both can be difficult and expensive to acquire if you develop a serious illness.

Seek legal advice in the event of a marriage breakdown. Changes to the law mean super entitlements may now be shared between you and an ex-spouse. Get the lowdown from a family law practitioner.

Under wraps

Does consolidating your finances mean paying more fees, asks **Daniel Bloom**

If the Future of Financial Advice (FoFA) reforms that come into play in July next year have the hoped-for effect, the financial advice industry will begin its long-overdue transformation from a sales-driven to a purely advisory profession.

But the new rules against conflict of interest in the selling process will only apply to advice relationships that start after the reforms become mandatory.

For existing accounts, incentives to recommend one product over another will still be in full swing. And for complicated financial products such as wrap funds, it can be especially

hard to know what qualifies as impartial advice, when you're getting it, and how much you're paying for what.

Wrap funds consolidate various financial holdings – from savings to share portfolios and managed funds – into a single account. One key advantage is a single statement of your financial position, which is good for keeping your financial life in order and making tax preparation less painful.

And wrap funds are also becoming easier to open. According to Rachael Wade, a financial planner at IAC Robertson, competition has resulted in most wrap funds eliminating or significantly reducing the minimum amount that must be retained in the working cash account.

Fee alert

But, with FoFA around the corner, perhaps the wider availability of wrap funds is no accident. Putting everything in the same box may be a way for advisers to keep hidden fees hidden and charge you for making simple changes to the account – the equivalent of moving money from a savings to a transaction account online,

Nutshell

- *Wrap funds are good in theory but in practice can be more beneficial to advisers than consumers.*
- *If you have an existing agreement, make sure your adviser is not keeping you in the dark.*

for instance. Regardless of the remuneration scheme, wrap funds opened before July next year will be vulnerable to the same kind of adviser-serving incentives that FoFA aims to eradicate.

Suzanne Haddan, an independent financial adviser and director of the BFG Group, confirms that the FoFA reforms “don’t deal with existing [wrap fund] clients, [and] financial advisers continue to receive volume bonuses. These are bonuses calculated on the amount consolidated in the wrap account”.

Business as usual could mean a field day for advisers intent on keeping clients in the dark, Haddan warns. “FoFA is quarantining existing wrap fund agreements, and they’re being turned into a money-making tool by some of the bigger funds.

“We recommend wrap funds, but we don’t get paid for recommending or



implementing a change to a client's fund. Advisers shouldn't be charging extra

disclosure statement is not always publicly available to consumers – it's

Consumers in existing wrap funds should have a candid conversation with their adviser

commissions or brokerage fees to do that."

Krystyna Weston, co-founder and director of SimpleWrap, echoes Haddan's view. "In funds that don't meet FoFA standards, clients are paying an inflated price that, in part, funds the rebates to the adviser or their licence holder." Funds that voluntarily abide by the FoFA regulations before these officially come into effect this year don't provide commissions or incentives for advisers to favour certain products.

Weston says smart consumers should question advisers to make sure their wrap fund meets FoFA standards – and best suits their financial needs.

Asking questions to work out the fee structure of any fund is always a good idea in any case. Travis Morien, director of Australian Independent Financial Advisers (AIFA), says it's becoming increasingly difficult for consumers to make informed decisions about wrap funds without putting themselves at the mercy of the adviser. "The product

often hidden away in an advisers-only section of a website," he says.

Eyes wide open

According to some industry players CHOICE spoke to, there are ways to avoid being gouged, even if you open a wrap fund before the FoFA reforms become mandatory. AMP spokesperson Renae McGregor argues the management strategy and fee structure of the company's wrap funds is open to negotiation.

"Any fees paid are set between the adviser and the client," says McGregor. "We don't pay advisers for transferring money into our wrap fund. If a customer has agreed to pay an adviser a member advice fee, we can facilitate that by automatically deducting it from the account. We would only deduct what the client has agreed to pay in the advice process."

That may be the case, but Weston says consumers need to take a hands-on

approach to keeping advisers honest. "FoFA has made it slightly more complex for consumers [in a pre-FoFA wrap fund]," she says.

Weston believes the solution is to take charge of the situation. "Always ask your adviser if the advice they are giving you is in your best interest. Understand how the product they are suggesting operates and ask if they receive a rebate and how much it is."

CHOICE verdict

If a wrap fund is a good fit for your financial circumstances, choose one that will comply with FoFA requirements or that charges fees for specific services that are clearly outlined in the agreement between you and your adviser.

Consumers in existing wrap funds should have a candid conversation with their adviser to make sure they understand the fees being charged and which services they are paying for. At a minimum, demand an annual statement of fees, no commissions, and no payments to advisers based on how many products they sell. ■

Are they worth it?

ASIC offers some no-nonsense advice and things to consider for consumers considering a wrap fund.

Upsides

- Access to a wide range of managed funds, investments and fund managers.
- A single consolidated report instead of individual reports for every investment or account.
- Potentially lower management fees if you have access to wholesale funds.

Downsides

- You can be charged fees for wrap fund administration, moving money in and out of the fund, management of different investment options and performance reports plus an overall service fee from your financial adviser.
- You may be locked into a particular adviser firm and have to liquidate the account as well as pay capital gains and an exit fee if you want to take your business elsewhere.
- Advisers may be recommending these funds for their own convenience, not yours.



Ask the Experts

Got a giggling question our team can help with?

For a number of years we've paid a small amount more for a 100% renewables electricity option (GreenPower), but after the carbon price was introduced, our electricity bill went up. Can our energy provider charge us extra despite the fact we use GreenPower?

CHOICE energy expert Katrina Lee replies: When you purchase GreenPower, you continue to receive electricity from the same network as you would otherwise. Electricity feeds into this network from a mixture of generation sources including coal, gas and renewables. The 100% GreenPower option does not in fact entail purchasing 100% of your power from green sources. What you're actually doing is paying a surcharge for 100% of your electricity usage, which is then funnelled by the energy retailers into funding green power generation. You are still, however, paying for the same electricity as everyone else on the grid.

As a result, the electricity usage part of your bill will be affected by the carbon price, and your costs will increase. However, the carbon price should not increase the amount you pay for the GreenPower surcharge component of your electricity bill. Some retailers are reducing the price of the GreenPower surcharge, so shop around and ask your retailer for a discount.

You can find out more about this at greenpower.gov.au/News/Facts-about-GreenPower-and-the-Carbon-Price/.

Katrina Lee



Ask us

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to us at Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

shouldn't be a problem – it will not have ready access to the enclosed poison.

Indoor ant baits can be used outside, as long as they are protected from water, which dilutes poison. However, if the baits are protected – under shelter, such as a flowerpot or rock – they can be used outdoors.

You can also try an economical, homemade option, using borax (the active chemical in Ant-Rid liquid) outdoors for ant control. To make your own ant trap, you'll need four tablespoons of borax powder, one cup of sugar, three cups of water, a glass jar with a lid and a small handful of cotton balls.

Dissolve the borax and sugar in water. Pour into the jar, add the cotton balls, close the jar lid and shake well. Punch lots of ant-sized holes in the lid. Leave the jar in a safe, shady place near ant activity. In a week or so, it will be full of dead ants.

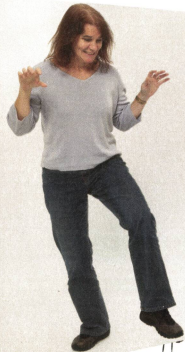
To kill ants in their nest, put 1/4 cup of icing sugar mixed with one tablespoon of borax in a saucer. Cover with an upside down terracotta flowerpot propped up on rocks so the ants can get to it but your cat can't. Some ants prefer savoury food to sweet, so you could try mixing borax powder with powdered parmesan cheese (for example) instead.

Every summer I have a severe infestation of ants in my home, and I'm trying to find a safe and effective way of controlling them. The ants are mainly outside but do find their way inside. I have tried outdoor surface sprays with little success. I have a cat

and my vet has advised me not to use anything containing permethrin, which is toxic to cats. Can you recommend any suitable products that are relatively safe to use?

CHOICE health expert Karina Bray responds: One of the safer options would be to get enclosed indoor ant baits. These consist of a plastic container with the pesticide enclosed and accessible only to ants. Combat Ant-Rid baits contain a pesticide called fipronil, which is also used in flea and tick control treatments for cats. Mortein Nest Kill ant baits contain indoxacarb, which is also used in flea and tick treatments.

While neither chemical should be eaten in large quantities, cats will inevitably ingest small amounts in flea treatment (in the process of grooming) with no serious effects, so even if your cat consumes a contaminated ant there



On Test

Lawn trimmers, ovens, ceiling fans and car GPS apps – they're all here

48 Gardening special

Get out into your backyard and enjoy the spring sunshine with our recommended lawn trimmers, edgers and hedge trimmers

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The days of the worst household chore – cleaning the oven by hand – are long gone

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You'll be opening up your wallet if you or a family member leave the door open for too long

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Not just for summer, they can help keep your home warm too

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Are they evolved enough to drive the dedicated units out of business for good?

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Our testing of nine models finds only two safe enough to recommend

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They're handy, but are they safe?

Seeing double?
Our test of two-seater strollers is on page 70

CHOICE's Chris Barnes is causing double trouble!



CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE's experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.



CHOICE Shopper

For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE subscriber number.



CHOICE Online

Wherever you see a mouse icon, there is more information about this test at choice.com.au.



CHOICE Best Buy

Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.



CHOICE Green Buy

Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.



Gardens of Eden

Creating and maintaining a backyard paradise isn't as difficult or costly as you might think, says **Sam Butler**

Now that spring's here, you might be keen to head outside and bask in the sun while tending to your garden. But making it look magazine-cover beautiful could require a bit more effort than just pulling some weeds, pruning some roses or running your lawnmower over the grass.

CHOICE checked out 15 lawn trimmers, including petrol, electric (corded) and battery (cordless) models, which we've added to previously tested trimmers (see *CHOICE*, September 2010) still on the market. We also looked at electric- and petrol-powered lawn edgers and a selection of electric and cordless hedge trimmers, to find a gardening tool (or tools) that will best suit your needs.

Nutshell

➤ *CHOICE* reviews lawn and hedge trimmers as well as lawn edgers, including petrol, electric and battery-powered models.

➤ *Our Best Buys* in each category will save you hundreds of dollars.

PREVIOUSLY TESTED

PETROL

81%

Shindaiwa Home Pro 22F, \$299 (*CHOICE*, Sep '10)

Lawn trimmers

Lawn trimmers, also known as line trimmers and whipper-snippers, come in straight- and curved-shaft models as well as petrol, electric and battery-powered variants (see table, page 50).

Electric models generally cost less than petrol ones but require you to drag an extension cord behind you, which can be dangerous. By contrast, the cordless lawn trimmers on test are all powered by an 18V lithium-ion (Li-ion) battery. They're only OK or borderline performers overall, but they may do the job if you have a small backyard. Both electric and battery-powered lawn trimmers are easier to start and quieter to use than petrol models. ▶

WHAT TO BUY

PETROL

87%

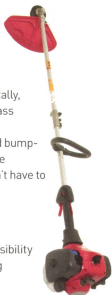
Husqvarna 122LD, \$299

Good points

- Excellent at trimming vertically and horizontally, and trimming long grass
- Comfortable handles
- Excellent controls and bump-feed for the cutting line
- Long shaft so you don't have to bend over

Bad points

- Heavy
- The guard restricts visibility a little while trimming
- Difficult to fill the petrol tank



ELECTRIC

70%

Flymo Samurai 1000, \$119 (*CHOICE*, Sep '10)

WHAT TO BUY

PETROL (continued)

85%

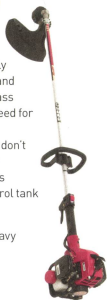
Shindaiwa Home Pro 22T, \$399

Good points

- Excellent at trimming vertically and horizontally, and trimming long grass
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- Long shaft so you don't have to bend over
- Very good controls
- Easy to fill the petrol tank

Bad points

- Comparatively heavy



82%

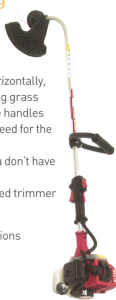
Morrison BC260B, \$219

Good points

- Excellent at trimming vertically and horizontally, and trimming long grass
- Very comfortable handles
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- Long shaft so you don't have to bend over
- Very well-balanced trimmer

Bad points

- Noticeable vibrations
- Poor re-spooling



80%

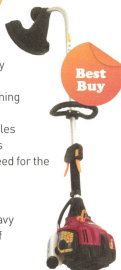
Homelite HLT25CS, \$97

Good points

- Excellent at trimming vertically and horizontally
- Very good at trimming long grass
- Comfortable handles
- Very good controls
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line

Bad points

- Comparatively heavy
- OK only for ease of re-spooling



ELECTRIC

75%

Stihl FSE 71, \$229

Good points

- Good at trimming vertically and horizontally
- Comfortable rear handle with soft grip
- Excellent bump-feed for the cutting line
- Long shaft so you don't have to bend over
- Very well balanced
- Excellent controls
- Vibration is hardly noticeable
- Very easy to re-spool

Bad points

- Poor at trimming long grass
- The guard restricts visibility while trimming



70%

Flymo Contour 500XT, \$79

Good points

- Good at trimming vertically
- Very comfortable handles
- Excellent controls
- Fitted with a 12m long power cord

Bad points

- Poor at trimming long grass
- Not particularly well balanced
- Only OK for ease of re-spooling



ABOUT THE REST

PETROL

Of the other newly tested petrol lawn trimmers, all except the **McCulloch** are good performers overall and worth considering if the price is right.

ELECTRIC (CORDED)

The **Gardener's Choice N1E-SPK-500** vibrates badly and isn't very well balanced. Also, the guard restricts visibility a lot while trimming. The **Echo GTE 350** has an ongoing cost, as you have to purchase new spools – it cannot be re-spooled with new line.

CORDLESS

The **Ryobi CLT1830LBC** and **Worx WG151E.5** battery-powered lawn trimmers are very easy to use but also very poor at trimming long grass. The **Bosch** is very poor for trimming long grass and its short shaft length isn't good for vertical trimming. Manual cutting line replacement is required every time it wears down, and the guard restricts visibility a lot while trimming.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Safety guard This is mounted around the rear of the cutting head to reduce the amount of debris flying around your legs. Some guards can limit your view of what you're cutting, such as when cutting vertically.

Line-length-limiting blade

All models on test except the Bosch have a small blade mounted on the safety guard that cuts the trimming line off at the correct length (the Bosch doesn't have a line and comes with pre-cut length blades). An overlong line can overload the motor.

A **shoulder harness**, which clips onto the shaft and supports the trimmer's weight, can be useful. It's usually an optional extra, and you can't attach one to all trimmers.

The bump-feed system, found on most trimmers on test, is easy to use – simply tap the cutting head on the ground when you need more line to feed out. The automatic system sends out more cutting line when it gets too short, while manual feeds require you to turn off the trimmer and pull or unwind the line inside the head.

Edging guide helps you cut in a straight line, or around a tree without damaging the trunk.

Spool type Fitting new cutting line, or re-spooling, can be one of the fiddliest tasks involved in using a lawn trimmer. A trimmer with a single cutting line is easier to re-spool than one with twin lines though the latter can give better cutting performance.

Cutting diameter A wide diameter is useful if you want to trim open areas. All petrol lawn trimmers on test have a wider diameter than the cordless models and most of the electric ones.

Handle Most models on test have an adjustable handle that can be rotated on the shaft when you turn the trimmer over, to change from horizontal trimming to vertical edging (on some models, the cutting head can be rotated instead for the same purpose). Do it up just tight enough to hold it in place, but so that it still swivels when you turn it over.

Accessories Adjusting tools such as a spanner are often included as standard. Some trimmers have other accessories (usually as optional extras), such as brush-cutting blades or extra edging heads.

PETROL

A **transparent fuel tank** makes it easy to see when you're running low on petrol, and makes refuelling easier as you can see how much petrol to pour in.

A **clutch** stops the cutting head from spinning when the motor idles, which is safer while you're moving between areas. All petrol models on test have one.

CORDLESS

Adjustable-length shaft Because the cordless models' motors are at the head rather than the handle end, they have no drive shaft, so the length of the shaft can be adjusted. All cordless models on test have this feature.



LAWN TRIMMERS		PERFORMANCE				FEATURE	
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise at user's position/7.5m (dB)	Shoulder harness	Edging guide
PETROL							
# Husqvarna 122LD	299	87	98	75	94/77		
# Shindaiwa Home Pro 22T	399	85	98	72	94/79		
# Morrison BC260B	219	82	98	65	104/85		
Shindaiwa Home Pro 22F	299	81	88	74	96/75		
# Homelite HLT25CS	97	80	88	71	97/80		
Gardener's Choice GCT-260	199	79	88	69	105/77		
Stihl FS 38	249	79	88	69	96/75		
Makita RST250	299	78	88	67	104/73		
Honda UMS425U	369	76	88	63	110/76		
# Troy-Bilt TB80 EC	129	76	78	73	100/83		
Echo GT-22GES	229	75	78	71	93/74		
# Ryobi RLTM260CS	184	74	78	70	101/82		
# Rockwell RG8082	149	72	78	66	100/81		
# McCulloch MT 250 LK	129	69	68	69	97/75		
Victa Tornado TTB2226	199	69	78	59	105/79	✓	
ELECTRIC							
# Stihl FSE 71	229	75	64	86	83/71		
# Flymo Contour 500XT	79	70	60	79	77/65		✓
Flymo Samurai 1000	119	70	62	78	79/61		
Black & Decker GL741-XE	110	66	56	75	79/60		✓
# Gardener's Choice N1E-SPK-500	49	66	58	73	88/73		✓
# Echo GTE 350	99	65	46	84	84/72		
Stihl FSE 41	149	52	20	84	85/66		✓
CORDLESS							
Victa Envirotimmer ETP5912B	149	64	48	80	77/61	✓	✓
Black & Decker Cordless BST2018-XE	169	63	48	77	83/63		✓
# Ryobi CLT1830LBC	189	62	44	80	82/64		
# Worx WG151E.5	199	62	44	80	80/65		✓
Ozito Cordless Line Trimmer OZCLT18VA	79	52	34	70	79/61		
# Bosch ART 26 LI	189	49	26	71	73/58		

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2012. Scores The overall score is made up of left: All battery-powered lawn trimmers use an 18V Li-ion battery. TABLE NOTES # Newly tested model. na Not

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Lawn edgers

These edgers separate your lawn from a path, driveway or other hard surface. Because they lock into line and don't wobble much they leave a cleaner, more professional separation than a lawn trimmer or lawnmower can. The edger's blades will hit the hard surface it's running alongside of (except for those of the Morrison, which has a blade guide), but they're designed to last longer than those on a standard lawn trimmer.

Lawn edgers come in electric and petrol models. The Victa petrol model (below) is ideal for larger gardens where your mains power supply is located too far away to use an electric edger. ▶

PETROL

73%

Victa

Commando CE254, \$449

Good points

- Excellent at edging kerbs and paths, and leaves a neat finish
- Good at edging near a vertical wall
- Very easy to manoeuvre on a hard surface
- Very good cutting height adjuster and visibility while edging

Bad points

- Hard to push and doesn't turn easily on grass
- The blade engagement bar isn't comfortable to hold
- The controls aren't well labelled and the blade lever is not particularly easy to engage
- Noticeable vibration



WHAT TO BUY

CORDED

78%

Ryobi

RED1520G, \$150

Good points

- Very good at edging kerbs and paths, and leaves a very neat finish
- Excellent to manoeuvre on a hard surface
- Excellent controls, height-adjustable handle and visibility while edging
- Very good cutting height adjuster



Bad points

- Poor at edging near a vertical wall as it leaves a 1-2 cm wide grassy strip behind
- Not particularly easy to manoeuvre on grass and it's hard to hold the line

76%

Atom

310, \$289

Good points

- Good at edging kerbs and paths, and leaves a neat finish
- Very easy to manoeuvre on a hard surface
- Easy to manoeuvre on grass, though it requires strength to hold the line
- Very good, user-adjustable handle height
- Excellent controls, visibility while edging and cutting-height adjuster



Bad points

- Only OK at edging near a vertical wall – leaves a groove that doesn't look neat

SPECIFICATIONS

Line type	Shaft type	Battery life / charge time (mins)	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	Cutting diameter (cm)	Contact
B	S	na	5.4	178	44	husqvarna.com.au/
B	S	na	5.0	174	46	allpower.com.au
B	C	na	4.9	173	39	4morrison.com.au
B	C	na	5.0	160	32	allpower.com.au
B	C	na	5.4	158	43	bunnings.com.au
B	C	na	4.9	173	41	kmart.com.au
B	C	na	4.6	150	40	stihl.com.au
B	C	na	4.6	156	40	makita.com.au
B	C	na	5.3	161	38	hondashop.com.au
B	S	na	5.6	168	43	troybilt.com
B	C	na	4.5	153	40	allpower.com.au
B	C	na	4.9	155	46	ryobi.com.au
M	C	na	4.8	152	42	rockwelltools.com.au
B	C	na	4.3	136	44	mcculloch.com.au
M	C	na	5.2	162	40	victa.com.au
B	C	na	3.9	153	36	stihl.com.au
A	S	na	3.8	102-118	26	flymo.com.au
B	C	na	4.8	146	35	flymo.com.au
A	C	na	3.3	120	33	blackanddecker.com.au
B	S	na	2.6	102-125	32	kmart.com.au
B	S	na	1.9	109-117	25	allpower.com.au
B	S	na	2.6	118-127	28	stihl.com.au
A	S	ns / 720	5.2	117-129	25	victa.com.au
A	S	ns / 60	3.2	106-130	30	blackanddecker.com.au
A	S	15 / 60	2.9	110-128	31	ryobi.com.au
A	S	17 / 30	2.5	90-114	25	worxtools.com.au
B	S	ns / 60	2.5	104-127	25	ozito.com.au
M	S	25 / 180	2.2	77-112	25	bosch-garden.com.au/gardentools

performance and ease of use, weighted evenly. **Features** See What to Look For. applicable. **ns** Not stated. **A** Automatic. **B** Bump. **M** Manual. **C** Curved. **S** Straight.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for an edger that **feels solid** in your hands and isn't flimsy or wobbly.

Check for a **definite marking on the**

blade cover that helps in following the line between the lawn and the footpath (for example).

The **blade height** should be easily adjustable.

A **blade guide** prevents the blade hitting the concrete path. However, you'll end up with a wider gap between the path and the grass.



ABOUT THE REST

The **Morrison** has a blade guide (see left) and is excellent to manoeuvre on a hard surface and very good at edging kerbs and paths, but poor at edging near a vertical wall as it leaves a 1-2cm wide grassy strip behind. It's also not particularly easy to manoeuvre on grass and it's hard to hold the line.

LAWN EDGERS		PERFORMANCE					FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS			
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise at user's position /7.5 m (dB)	Blade guide	Telescopic handle	Adjustable front handle	Edging guide	No. of depth positions	Weight (kg)	Depth range (mm)	Contact
ELECTRIC													
Ryobi RED1520G	150	78	73	83	81 / 66	✓	✓	✓	✓	Variable	6.7	0-40	ryobi.com.au
Atom 310	289	76	70	81	78 / 65	✓		na		7	8.6	0-80	atomindustries.com.au
Morrison 552558	139	67	60	73	89 / 72	✓		✓	✓	3	6.4	12-42	4morrison.com.au
PETROL													
Victa Commando CE254	449	73	80	66	78 / 66			na	✓	Variable	30.4	0-65	victa.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance and ease of use, weighted evenly. **Features** See What to Look For, above. **TABLE NOTES** na Not applicable.

Hedge trimmers

Electric hedge trimmers are handy for keeping wayward hedges at bay, and the Pope is the only model on test that isn't a good or very good performer overall. Our testing also found that the wider the gap between teeth, the better the hedge trimmer performs.

All the cordless battery-powered hedge trimmers operate on full power until the battery is discharged, so you won't have to worry about it running at less than 100% as it slowly powers down to flat.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for a hedge trimmer that's **not too heavy to hold** and is **well balanced**.

Tooth gaps Generally, models with larger tooth gaps are more suitable for heavy-duty hedging.

A **wrap-around front handle** with multiple switches makes it easy to change from cutting horizontally to vertically.

A **hand guard** reduces the likelihood of debris being thrown back towards the user.

Rotating head The cutting mechanism can be rotated for easier vertical edging.

Two-handed operation All trimmers on test except the Ryobi Shears/Shrubber require both hands to start – a good safety feature.

HEDGE TRIMMERS	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES	
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Hand guard	Wrap-around front handle
ELECTRIC						
Ryobi RHT600RLG	129	83	90	75	✓	✓
Stihl HSE 61	299	83	90	75	✓	✓
Echo Electric HC560	199	82	90	74	✓	✓
Ozito HTR-550	79	80	90	70	✓	✓
Flymo EasiCut EC450	79	77	80	73	✓	✓
Bosch AHS 45-16	99	74	80	68	✓	✓
Homelite LHT550	59	74	80	67	✓	✓
Pope Power Cut 46 101HT450	60	67	70	63	✓	✓
CORDLESS						
Worx WG251E.5	199	67	60	74	✓	✓
Victa Breeze LHT-152	229	64	60	67	✓	✓
Ryobi Shears/Shrubber CGS1820LBC	169	60	50	70		

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of **Features** See What to Look For, left. All battery-powered hedge trimmers use an 18V Li-ion battery.

WHAT TO BUY

83%

Ryobi

RHT600RLG, \$129

Good points

- Excellent wrap-around handle at the front, and the rear handle can be rotated 180° for vertical or horizontal trimming
- Very good visibility while trimming hedges
- Good controls

Bad points

- None to mention



Keep an eye out for **CHOICE**, November 2012, in which we'll be putting lawnmowers to the test

SPECIFICATIONS									
Blade extension (cm)	Rotating head	Weight (kg)	Blade length (cm)	Tooth gap (cm)	Battery life / charge time (mins)	Contact			
✓	✓	3.6	60	2.7	na	ryobi.com.au			
✓	✓	4.2	50	2.2	na	stihl.com.au			
✓	✓	3.7	56	2.2	na	allpower.com.au			
✓	✓	3.0	55	2.0	na	ozito.com.au			
		3.2	45	1.6	na	flymo.com.au			
		2.6	45	1.6	na	bunnings.com.au			
		2.6	45	1.6	na	bunnings.com.au			
		2.8	46	1.4	na	bigw.com.au			
		2.4	52	1.4	30 / 30	worxtools.com.au			
✓	✓	2.7	52	1.2	20 / 180-300	victa.com.au			
✓		1.6	20	0.8	35 / 60	ryobi.com.au			

performance and ease of use, weighted evenly.
TABLE NOTES na Not applicable.

83%

Stihl

HSE 61, \$299

Good points

- Excellent wrap-around handle at the front, and the rear handle can be rotated 180° for vertical or horizontal trimming
- Well-balanced unit when used without the hedge sweep
- Very good controls

Bad points

- Feels fairly heavy, especially with prolonged use



80%

Ozito

HTR-550, \$79

Good points

- Excellent wrap-around handle at the front, and the rear handle can be rotated 180° for vertical or horizontal trimming
- Very good controls

Bad points

- Not very well balanced – tilts towards the back where the motor is located
- Visibility while trimming hedges is restricted by the handle and hand guard



82%

Echo

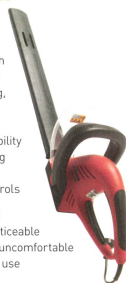
Electric HC560, \$199

Good points

- Good handles – comfortable wrap-around handle for both horizontal and vertical edging, even though it doesn't rotate
- Very good visibility while trimming hedges
- Excellent controls

Bad points

- Vibration is noticeable and becomes uncomfortable with extended use



ABOUT THE REST

ELECTRIC

All the other electric hedge trimmers on test are good overall except the **Pope**, and worth considering if you find one at a good price. The Pope is lightweight but feels a little underpowered, especially when cutting thicker branches. Its handle and the hand guard also restrict visibility when trimming, and its controls aren't very easy to use.

CORDLESS

All the cordless hedge trimmers on test are OK overall. The **Victa** and **Worx** are both lightweight, with very good controls but only OK trimming performance – they feel a little underpowered, especially when cutting thicker branches. The **Ryobi Shears/Shrubber** is very lightweight and has excellent visibility when trimming hedges. However, its handle and trimming performance are both only borderline. ■

Easy does it

All the ovens in this test perform well – the biggest differences are in how easy they are to use and to clean, as **Rebecca Gatto** explains

Nutshell

- Ease of use and cleaning separates the best electric ovens from the rest.
- We've made some changes to the way we test ovens to better reflect how you use them and the factors that matter to you.

These days there's very little difference between electric ovens when it comes to straight cooking performance. The real differences appear when you look at ease of use, with scores in our latest test ranging from OK to excellent (see table, page 56). Features such as fingerprint-resistant stainless steel, telescopic runners, pyrolytic or catalytic

liners, smokeless grill trays and a good viewing window all make ovens easier to use.

In this test, our home economist, Fiona Mair, put 10 ovens through a range of tests, including cooking chicken, pizza, toast, scones and meringues. The What to Buy models (opposite) stand out from the pack, and set the benchmark for ease of use.

As a result of what you told us in a recent product use survey, we've removed two tests from the program – grilling sausages and baking custard tarts. The survey, which had more than 2500 responses, asked CHOICE members about how you typically use your oven, and what factors are important to you.

In past testing, we've split the

performance score into a separate grill and oven score. However, in this test we've combined them into one overall performance score (equally weighted between cooking scones, meringues, roast chicken, pizza and grilling toast). We've also provided individual scores for each of these tests. For previously tested models, the scores have been adjusted accordingly.

Two of our What to Buy models, the Westinghouse POR883S and Electrolux EPEE63CS, were tested and recommended in 2010 but have since had some updates made to them. So we decided to re-test the current versions of both of these ovens. Both are still excellent performers overall so we recommend them again.

WHAT TO BUY



Best Buy

\$1109

92%

Westinghouse POR667S

Good points

- Excellent overall and for performance and ease of use
- Smokeless grill tray
- Shield in front of grill element
- Door and glass can be removed and grill element can be lowered for cleaning
- Excellent visibility through door
- Fingerprint-resistant stainless steel
- Easy to clean

Bad points

- No surface temperature label on door
- No cleaning function
- Doesn't have fan assist, half-grill or bottom-element-only functions, pizza functions or warm mode
- No child lock



\$2639

91%

Electrolux EPEE63CS

Good points

- Excellent overall and for ease of use
- Controls are easy to use
- Grill trays roll out smoothly and have a stopper
- Smokeless grill tray
- Fingerprint-resistant stainless steel
- Excellent visibility through door
- Pyrolytic cleaning function
- Door and glass can be removed and grill element can be lowered for cleaning
- Shield in front of grill element
- Easy to clean
- Preset temperature for each function
- Pre-programmed cooking function
- Telescopic shelf runners
- Child lock

Bad points

- Digital display is not very bright
- No surface temperature label on door
- Doesn't have the half-grill function



\$2119

91%

Westinghouse POR883S

Good points

- Excellent overall and for ease of use
- Smokeless grill tray
- Controls are easy to use
- Shield in front of grill element
- Door and glass can be removed and grill element can be lowered for cleaning
- Excellent visibility through door
- Fingerprint-resistant stainless steel
- Easy to clean
- Pyrolytic cleaning function
- Preset temperature for each function
- Child lock

Bad points

- No surface temperature label on door
- Doesn't have half grill or warm mode



ABOUT THE REST

The **Bosch** has knobs with no grip and small labels. If you're not using the telescopic runners the shelves don't move out smoothly, and the grill tray doesn't have a stopper so can be pulled out easily. The shelves have a raised bar at the front, making it difficult to slide out dishes. The grill element has a protective shield and can be lowered for cleaning, and there's a

smokeless grill tray. The stainless steel exterior requires effort to clean.

The **Miele H4402B** controls are basic and with very little grip. The shelves have stoppers but we found they don't stop the shelf from being pulled out too far. There's no smokeless grill tray or protective shield in front of the grill. The stainless steel exterior has a coating to prevent finger marks. The back wall

has a catalytic liner and the interior has a non-stick enamel coating, which is easy to wipe over.

The **Chef EOC647S** has good controls with clear labelling. Shelves move out smoothly and there is good visibility through the door. There's no smokeless grill tray but the grill has a protective shield and the grill tray has stoppers. The stainless steel exterior requires ▶

For information on how we test ovens, go to choice.com.au/ovens

effort to clean, but moulded shelf supports are easy to wipe over and the grill element can be lowered for cleaning.

The **Blanco BOSE6APX** has touch controls, which might take some time to become familiar with. The grill tray has a protective shield and moves out smoothly, however it has no stoppers or smokeless grill tray. This oven failed the shelf tilt test – we found its shelves tilt too much and sit loosely in the shelf supports. The stainless steel requires effort to clean but the shelf supports are easy to remove for cleaning. The grill element can be lowered for cleaning.

The **Smeg SAP 306X-9** has small dial controls with hard-edged cross bars. The grill tray rolls out smoothly but has a slight tilt and no smokeless grill tray. There's good visibility through the door. The stainless steel has a coating that prevents finger marks, but the glass

shows finger marks and smudges easily. The grill element can't be lowered for cleaning.

The **DeLonghi DE60MS** has controls with limited grip and small labels. The grill tray has no stoppers, the grill element has no protective shield and there's no smokeless grill tray. Visibility through the small viewing window is poor. The stainless steel is easy to clean but the glass smudges easily. Cracks and crevices inside the oven and baked-on grease on the enamel surface can be difficult to clean.

The **Bellissimo** has no smokeless grill tray and the grill rack has a small surface area. The grill tray has no stoppers but you can use the second shelf instead, which has a telescopic runner. The stainless steel exterior requires effort to clean and shelf supports are difficult to remove. ■

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Useable space Check this by taking your largest baking dish with you to the store.

Telescopic shelf runners keep the shelf stable.

The grill tray with a safety stop should slide in and out easily and far enough to allow you to place food at the back.

Shelves should have safety stops to prevent them from being pulled out accidentally, and shouldn't tilt when pulled out with a load.

Catalytic liners absorb fat splatters. Regularly heat the oven to 250°C for an hour to burn off the splatters and, when cool, wipe them with a damp cloth. These liners may eventually need replacing.

Pyrolytic cleaning locks the oven door and heats it to about 500°C, turning food residue to ash, which you then

wipe away once it's cooled. The shelves and supports must be removed and the glass door interior must be cleaned manually first. When using this function the kitchen needs to be well ventilated as the oven can emit smoke and a very strong smell depending on how dirty the oven is.

A smokeless grill tray traps fat and grease below it to avoid splattering and smoking.

The grill element should be set high into the ceiling or have a shield so it can't be accidentally touched.

Stainless steel exterior that is fingerprint-resistant will save cleaning time.



	Price (\$)	
# Westinghouse POR667S	1109	2
# Electrolux EPE663CS	2639	2
# Westinghouse POR883S	2119	2
Fisher & Paykel OB60S9DEP	2199	3
# Bosch HBA63S451A	1799	2
# Miele H4402B	1199	2
Miele H 5241 BP (A)	3499	2
# Chef EOC647S	899	2
Smeg SA 304X8	1690	2
# Blanco BOSE6APX	2599	2
Smeg SAP109M-8	2890	2
Chef EOC627W (B)	709	2
Fisher & Paykel OB60SCMX3	899	3
Miele H 5240 B	1999	2
Miele H 4810 B CleanSteel	1999	2
Westinghouse POR663S	1009	2
Blanco OE606X	1349	2
Neff B46W74N0GB	3999	2
Omega DO 612XN	1499	2
Siemens HB43AU550A	2399	2
Belling B160MFS	849	2
DeLonghi DE60PYROS	2099	3
Fisher & Paykel OB 60SCEX3	1049	2
# Smeg SAP 306X-9	2390	2
St George 8500200PS	2999	2
Baumatic B06FS	769	2
Euromaid 8 Multifunction Oven MS8	1029	2
# Bellissimo TB60FSS-3	1088	3
# DeLonghi DE60MS	1199	2
Baumatic B067MS	1179	2

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended function except the Fisher & Paykel OB60SCMX3, hour, three times per week for 10 years at 22c/kWh tested. * Models that have bottom + fan, bottom model is technically similar to the Chef EOC627S.

CALL US TODAY



1300 360 655

PERFORMANCE										FEATURES & FUNCTIONS										SPECIFICATIONS		
COOKING PERFORMANCE																						
Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Grill toast (%)	Scones (%)	Merquies (%)	Roast chicken (%)	Pizza (%)	Pyrolytic function	Catalytic liners	Telescopic runners	Smokeless grill tray	Clock	Fan grill	Pizza functions*	Fan assist	Top and bottom	Claimed external dimensions (mm. H x W x D)	Measured internal dimensions (mm. H x W x D)	Measured internal volume (L)	Contact			
94	90	95	93	95	85	100				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	595 x 595 x 566	300 x 480 x 420	61	westinghouse.com.au			
89	93	90	80	100	85	90	✓		2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	595 x 596 x 573	270 x 480 x 430	56	electrolux.com.au			
88	95	90	80	100	85	85	✓			✓	✓	✓				595 x 595 x 573	300 x 480 x 420	60	westinghouse.com.au			
94	75	100	90	95	100	85	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 595 x 567	325 x 440 x 420	60	fisherpaykel.com.au			
92	74	95	90	100	100	75	✓		2	✓	✓	✓			✓	595 x 595 x 548	330 x 490 x 410	67	bosch.com.au			
98	66	100	95	100	100	95	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	596 x 595 x 570	310 x 460 x 410	59	miele.com.au			
92	75	75	100	90	95	100	✓	(D)		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	596 x 595 x 547	390 x 470 x 410	75	miele.com.au			
87	80	90	80	100	85	80					✓	✓				595 x 595 x 567	270 x 480 x 420	55	chefappliances.com.au			
94	68	90	85	95	100	100						✓		✓	✓	597 x 597 x 548	320 x 400 x 420	63	smeg.com.au			
88	75	75	85	100	90	90	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	594 x 592 x 561	260 x 480 x 390	47	blanco-australia.com			
90	73	95	80	100	100	75	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 597 x 548	380 x 470 x 390	70	smeg.com.au			
84	80	75	80	85	90	90		(D)								595 x 595 x 567	290 x 460 x 430	60	chefappliances.com.au			
91	68	80	100	100	100	75	(D)	(D)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 595 x 567	325 x 440 x 420	60	fisherpaykel.com.au			
92	68	75	90	100	100	95	✓	(D)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	596 x 595 x 547	390 x 470 x 410	75	miele.com.au			
90	70	70	80	100	100	100	✓	(D)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	578 x 595 x 546	390 x 470 x 410	75	miele.com.au			
85	78	75	80	100	90	80				✓						595 x 596 x 568	315 x 480 x 420	65	westinghouse.com.au			
83	78	65	85	90	100	75					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	594 x 598 x 522	350 x 465 x 385	63	blanco-australia.com			
81	80	65	85	80	95	80	✓	✓		✓					✓	595 x 595 x 548	320 x 475 x 420	64	neff.com.au			
81	80	55	70	95	90	95	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	594 x 594 x 535	330 x 470 x 400	62	omegaappliances.com.au			
83	75	75	85	85	100	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	595 x 595 x 548	330 x 470 x 420	65	siemens-home.com.au			
89	65	70	80	100	95	100					✓	✓		✓	✓	585 x 595 x 550	330 x 480 x 385	62	bellini.com.au			
83	70	60	75	100	90	90	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	594 x 594 x 560	350 x 425 x 400	60	delonghi.com.au			
83	70	70	75	95	100	75	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 595 x 567	280 x 460 x 420	48	fisherpaykel.com.au			
83	70	80	80	90	90	75	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	592 x 597 x 548	250 x 470 x 420	50	smeg.com.au			
85	65	60	90	85	90	100	(C)	(C)				✓	✓	✓	✓	620 x 597 x 585	400 x 480 x 400	77	sga.com.au			
78	73	75	70	80	90	75						✓				594 x 598 x 566	340 x 460 x 390	61	thinkappliances.com.au			
82	65	75	80	80	100	75	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	595 x 594 x 567	310 x 480 x 420	62	euromaid.com.au			
80	65	45	85	100	90	80			2		✓					589 x 594 x 568	250 x 460 x 410	48	technika.com.au			
84	60	75	85	95	85	80					✓		✓	✓	✓	594 x 594 x 560	270 x 460 x 420	50	delonghi.com.au			
82	60	80	80	80	90	80	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	601 x 598 x 565	370 x 460 x 390	66	thinkappliances.com.au			

as of July 2012. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **Features** See What to Look For, far left. **Functions** All ovens on test have a grill, and all have the fan-forced where available, the fan-forced function is used; if not, the fan assist is used, and for models that don't have this function, the top and bottom elements (convection or traditional bake) are used. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly an-forced or pizza mode are included in this column. (A) The Miele H 52418 (\$2495) is technically similar and will perform the same, but it doesn't have the pyrolytic feature, so ease of use may differ slightly. (B) This which has a stainless steel exterior instead of white. (C) This model has a steam clean function. (D) Available as an optional extra.

An open and shut case

It may cost you every time you open that fridge door, as **Matthew Steen** explains



Nutshell

- Six newly tested fridges join our previously tested models, with two recommended.
- Running costs depend on your habits – the more you open the fridge, the more it costs.

If you have a teenager or someone in your household who loves to just open the fridge and stare into it, slowly making up their mind about what to plunder (every home has one!), they're making it that much harder for the fridge to get back to the correct temperature, wasting energy and money.

CHOICE tests energy usage of fridges to the Australian standard, which means testing at 32°C ambient temperature. While most kitchens don't get this hot, this test offsets the amount of times some users open a fridge door. But what happens to the fridge temperature whenever you do just that? The answer is that much of the cold air that has been building up inside the fridge gradually spills out. When you close the door, the fridge needs to build up that cold air again.

As part of our latest round of fridge testing, we opened and closed three fridges of various sizes to see what kind of fluctuations would occur and get an idea of just how much more energy you use when you open the fridge door.

We found an increase of five to 14% in running costs. While you don't need to chain up the fridge, remember when you're planning your meal or thinking about getting something from the fridge, do it quickly and efficiently – especially with energy costs on the rise. ▶



WHAT TO BUY

MORE THAN 525L, INC. FRENCH DOOR

\$3399



78%

Fisher & Paykel RF610ADUX2

- Excellent recommended setting score
- Very good range of temperatures available
- Very good response to changes in room temperature

Bad points

- Long glass shelves are a bit heavy and awkward to remove
- No chiller

PREVIOUSLY TESTED

These are the best fridges in each size range, with a minimum of 60% for all aspects of temperature performance, except the recommended setting score. We exclude this because you can change the recommended setting to get a better result. Best

300-380L

Fisher & Paykel

E372B (B) (Dec 11/Jan 12)

Fisher & Paykel

381T Tasman (T) (May 06)

Westinghouse

M3700WB (B) (May 09)

450L

Fisher & Paykel

(B) (Dec 10/Jan 11)

Fisher & Paykel

(B) (May 09)



451-525L

Fisher & Paykel

E521T Elegance (T) (Nov 06)

\$1329

\$959

Westinghouse

\$1269

WBM5100WB (B) (Sept 09)



\$1899

MORE THAN 525L, INC. FRENCH DOOR

Haier

HTD647AS (FD) (Apr 11)

LG GR-L219CSL (FD) (Dec 11/Jan 12)

\$1919

\$1569

\$1999

\$3499

Month and year indicates CHOICE issue in which fridge was first tested. (B) Freezer on bottom. (T) Freezer on top. (FD) French doors.

FRIDGES

SIDE BY SIDE

\$1999



81%

LG GC-P197DPSL

Good points

- Very good energy score
- Excellent fluctuation score

Bad points

- No chiller

Buys are top performers with a good reliability rating that are relatively cheap to buy and run. Where possible, we've included both top and bottom freezers in relevant size categories. There are still no fridges that meet these criteria in the smallest sizes.

SIDE-BY-SIDE

Haier HSB5582AS (Jul 12)

\$1099

For profiles of previously tested What to Buy models, see CHOICE issue indicated or go to choice.com.au/fridges



choice SHOPPER 1300 360 655		COSTS		PERFORMANCE											
		Price (\$)	10-year running costs (\$)	Overall score (%)	Freezer	Number of doors	Temperature performance score (%)	Fluctuation score (%)	Range score (%)	Uniformity score (%)	Ambient change score (%)	Recommended setting score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	Noise level
<300L	Westinghouse WTB2500WB	739	887	70	T	2	67	80	70	75	33	85	82	415 / 403	33
	Sharp SJ-222S-SL	747	792	67	T	2	62	70	75	65	36	50	85	391 / 360	33
	Westinghouse WTB2300WB	689	887	67	T	2	63	80	70	60	29	80	81	411 / 403	33
	LG GN-253VW	699	928	65	T	2	61	45	70	70	58	80	81	435 / 422	47
	Samsung SR215MW	649	757	62	T	2	56	40	70	70	70	60	85	340 / 344	41
	Whirlpool WRI21UW	699	818	61	T	2	56	45	85	65	22	70	83	415 / 372	42
	# Westinghouse WTM2000WC	619	673	47	T	2	37	35	70	50	15	40	87	360 / 306	37
SMALL (300-380L)	Fisher & Paykel E372B	1329	1096	81	B	2	81	75	90	70	89	90	81	498 / 498	30
	Fisher & Paykel E381T	959	933	79	T	2	77	60	80	85	90	80	85	433 / 424	35
	Westinghouse WBM3700WB	1269	1058	76	B	2	74	65	90	75	67	70	82	495 / 481	38
	Changhong CHR310	599	856	75	T	2	73	90	85	70	36	65	85	435 / 389	32
	# Samsung SRL322MW	899	1019	72	B	2	70	70	40	90	87	75	82	460 / 463	38
	LG GC-305PS	899	1008	71	B	2	68	60	75	85	51	85	82	476 / 458	34
	Kelvinator KBM3800WB-R	1109	1155	70	B	2	68	80	55	70	69	50	80	555 / 525	37
SMALL (380-450L)	Samsung SR364MW	949	955	70	T	2	66	60	70	70	66	70	84	450 / 434	39
	Westinghouse WBM3700SB-R	1639	1063	68	B	2	65	55	78	65	64	65	82	495 / 483	34
	Westinghouse WTM3300WB	989	957	63	T	2	58	50	75	65	39	70	83	437 / 435	38
	# Westinghouse WTM3000WB	879	928	48	T	2	39	0	80	60	25	30	83	424 / 422	38
	Fisher & Paykel E442B	1919	1261	78	B	2	78	60	90	85	81	85	79	563 / 573	30
	Fisher & Paykel E406B	1569	1230	76	B	2	76	65	90	60	90	80	78	564 / 559	30
	Electrolux EBM4300SC	1959	869	75	B	2	72	70	90	55	69	75	88	406 / 395	33
MEDIUM (381-450L)	Fisher & Paykel E440T	1769	1087	74	T	2	72	50	85	80	77	85	83	488 / 494	30
	Samsung SR432NW	999	1054	74	T	2	72	65	80	75	77	50	84	455 / 479	36
	Fisher & Paykel E402B	1269	1234	73	B	2	72	60	85	65	80	80	78	528 / 561	35
	Electrolux ETM4407SC	2589	777	72	T	2	68	75	90	65	33	70	90	369 / 353	37
	Kelvinator KTM4400WB	1219	1021	72	T	2	69	65	90	70	45	80	84	486 / 464	41
	Fisher & Paykel E521T	1969	1091	78	T	2	76	60	85	85	77	80	85	508 / 496	35
	Westinghouse WBM5100WB	1899	1157	76	B	2	74	75	85	70	65	55	84	560 / 526	39
LARGE (451-525L)	Electrolux EBM5100SC	2379	882	74	B	2	70	70	80	65	62	80	89	428 / 401	34
	Electrolux EBM5107SC	2849	928	74	B	2	71	70	75	65	70	70	88	428 / 422	32
	Kelvinator KBM5100MB	1799	1305	74	B	2	72	80	70	80	57	60	81	589 / 593	38
	Westinghouse WTM5200WB	1689	1175	74	T	2	72	75	87	75	53	40	83	518 / 534	35
	Bosch KGN53X70AU/08	1599	1078	73	B	2	70	80	75	70	53	60	83	505 / 490	37
	Fisher & Paykel E522BRXFDU	2509	1379	72	B	2	70	55	85	70	77	50	79	636 / 627	34
	Haier HTD647AS	1999	1536	79	B	3	79	90	75	80	65	90	80	690 / 698	38
> 525L & FD	# Fisher & Paykel RF610ADUX2	3399	1540	78	B	3	78	70	85	75	80	90	78	663 / 700	32
	LG GR-L219CSL	3499	1489	74	B	4	73	80	70	70	64	85	79	750 / 677	35
	Electrolux EQE6007SB-NAU	3699	1454	70	B	4	67	40	85	90	85	70	84	616 / 661	34
	Samsung SRF801GDLS	4999	1558	69	B	4	66	65	55	75	69	75	80	845 / 708	33
	# Samsung SRF527DLSL	2299	1263	52	B	3	45	10	85	65	81	75	82	637 / 574	39
	# LG GC-P197DPSL	1999	1362	81	L	2	81	90	85	65	79	75	82	638 / 619	37
	Haier HSB5582AS	1099	1511	75	L	2	74	80	70	60	82	75	78	637 / 687	38
SIDE BY SIDE	LG GC-L197STF	2199	1155	75	L	2	74	70	80	70	76	70	81	638 / 645	33
	Daewoo FRS-U201CW	1399	1463	74	L	2	72	60	80	75	74	90	81	650 / 665	38

FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS							
Dairy compartment	Rollers	All shelves removable at 90°	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Crisper drawer	Fresh food shelves / shelf positions	Door hinge position	Contact	
✓		✓	150 x 54 x 62	246	167	79	1	2/7	Rev	westinghouse.com.au	
			139 x 55 x 61	222	166	79	1	2/7	R	sharp.net.au	
✓			139 x 54 x 62	230	161	65	1	3/7	Rev	westinghouse.com.au	
			161 x 54 x 61	253	179	74	1	2/4	R	lge.com.au	
		✓	145 x 57 x 59	216	148	68	1	2/4	R	samsung.com.au	
	✓	✓	145 x 56 x 67	212	149	63	1	2/3	Rev	whirlpool.com.au	
	✓	✓	148 x 53 x 60	203	144	59	1	3/5	Rev	westinghouse.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	160 x 64 x 74	373	250	123	2	2/13	R or L	fp.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	160 x 64 x 72	380	283	97	1	3/18	Rev	fp.com.au	
✓	✓		162 x 66 x 71	365	243	122	1	2/7	R or L	westinghouse.com.au	
		✓	152 x 61 x 67	300	220	80	2	3/7	R	changhong.com.au	
		✓	178 x 60 x 65	324	209	115	1	3/7	Rev	samsung.com.au	
		✓	173 x 60 x 66	305	183	122	1	2/4	R	lge.com.au	
✓	✓		172 x 71 x 65	380	267	114	1	2/10	R	kelvinator.com.au	
		✓	169 x 67 x 66	365	245	120	1	2/5	R	samsung.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	162 x 66 x 71	370	243	122	1	2/7	R	westinghouse.com.au	
✓	✓		172 x 61 x 65	330	253	75	1	3/12	R	westinghouse.com.au	
✓	✓		162 x 61 x 65	300	227	73	1	3/10	Rev	westinghouse.com.au	
✓	✓		170 x 68 x 73	442	307	135	2	3/17	R	fp.com.au	
✓	✓		160 x 68 x 74	404	271	133	2	3/13	R or L	fp.com.au	
✓	✓		172 x 71 x 71	430	300	131	1	2/8	R or L	electrolux.com.au	
✓	✓		170 x 68 x 74	447	342	105	1	3/20	R or L	fp.com.au	
		✓	171 x 73 x 72	434	301	133	1	3/4	R	samsung.com.au	
✓	✓		170 x 64 x 73	403	280	123	2	3/10	R or L	fp.com.au	
✓	✓		172 x 70 x 75	442	339	103	1	3/17	R or L	electrolux.com.au	
✓	✓		172 x 71 x 71	431	300	131	1	3/10	R or L	kelvinator.com.au	
✓	✓		170 x 79 x 74	517	400	117	1	3/20	R or L	fp.com.au	
✓	✓		172 x 81 x 71	504	348	156	2	3/20	R or L	westinghouse.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 75	510	349	156	2	2/8	R or L	electrolux.com.au	
✓	✓		171 x 79 x 62	505	349	156	2	2/8	R	electrolux.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 71	505	349	156	2	2/10	R or L	kelvinator.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 71	520	396	122	2	3/12	R	westinghouse.com.au	
		✓	170 x 70 x 75	451	332	119	2	3/4	Rev	bosch-home.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	170 x 79 x 74	519	360	159	2	3/17	R	fp.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	177 x 91 x 71	647	423	211	2	4/15 (C)	na	haierlife.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	179 x 90 x 73	614	433	181	2	2/14	na	fp.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	178 x 91 x 77	610	402	196	2	2/14	na	lge.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	172 x 89 x 82	602	370	232	2	2/4	na	electrolux.com.au	
✓	✓	✓	178 x 91 x 92	801	433	225	2	3/7 (D)	na	samsung.com.au	
			178 x 82 x 77	527	352	175	2	2/4	na	samsung.com.au	
✓	✓		176 x 90 x 73	567	353	214	0	3/8	na	lge.com.au	
✓	✓		177 x 89 x 75	575	348	227	2	3/9	na	haierlife.com.au	
✓	✓		176 x 90 x 69	567	353	214	2	3/9	na	lge.com.au	
✓	✓		179 x 90 x 73	618	377	241	2	3/6	na	daewooelectronics.com.au	

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score consists of temperature performance (80%) and energy efficiency (20%).

Temperature performance

This score consists of fluctuations (30%), range (25%), uniformity (20%), ambient change (20%) and recommended setting (5%).

Features See What to Look For, page 62.

Energy efficiency is based on the fridge's energy consumption, taking into account its size.

Noise level These are comparative measurements taken 1m up and 1m away from the fridge during normal running. Fridges can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts and stops and may make unusual noises during automatic defrosting.

Claimed volumes This is how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh food compartment.

10-year running costs are calculated at a rate of 22c/kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy use – and you should expect your fridge to last at least this long.

Price Recommended retail, as of August 2012. Many fridges are available in other styles and finishes, at a different price. Some can also be built into cabinets with a door kit that matches your kitchen cupboards.

TABLE NOTES

Newly tested model.

na Not applicable – doors are side-by-side.

T Top.

B Bottom. **L** Left. **R** Right.

Rev Reversible door.

(A) FlexiZone drawer can be set as a chiller.

(B) This chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods.

(C) Four half-width shelves.

(D) Three variable half shelves and one small fixed shelf.





Issues

We reported in our previous fridge test (*CHOICE* July 2012) that the Samsung SRL322MW sample didn't meet the standard requirement for energy testing.

Samsung claimed this was a faulty sample, so we bought another. It met the standard and performed well in most areas, though we can't recommend it due to its single control, which gives it a very limited range and therefore poor range score.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A **chiller** is important for storing meat, fish and poultry (fresh or cooked) at a safe temperature for longer. If you're choosing a fridge with this feature, the chiller's temperature should be close to zero and ideally have a separate temperature control.

Crisper Look for a well-sealed crisper drawer to keep vegetables fresh and check the fridge's air outlets don't blow onto it, as this will dry food out faster. A good crisper means you don't have to put your fruit and veggies in plastic bags. A fridge with one crisper drawer is usually the full width of the fridge; two crispers are usually each half the width, but occasionally you'll find a wider and a narrower one.

A **dairy compartment** is convenient for keeping butter and hard cheeses slightly soft.

Fresh food shelves should be easy to remove and replace and the range of shelf positions should suit your needs. Can you stand soft-drink or wine bottles in the door shelves, for example? Split shelves can be handy for this.

Rollers are useful for moving the fridge easily and cleaning behind the fridge. It should also have adjustable feet (or rollers) for levelling the fridge. Four rollers are better than two, provided they

have brakes or adjustable feet to secure the fridge in place.

Removable shelves Having all shelves removable when the door is at 90° is important for access and cleaning when the fridge has to be positioned with the door hinge next to a wall.

Door hinge Be sure to buy a fridge with a door hinge position that suits your kitchen layout. If you tend to move house a lot, opt for a door/hinge that is reversible (i.e. can be switched to swing from right to left or left-right), though you may have to purchase a kit and/or call in a service person to do it.



HOW WE TEST

Temperature performance Our tester, Corinna Horrigan, assesses **temperature fluctuations** – the amount

the temperatures swing as the compressor stops and starts – as even temperature is an important factor in maintaining food quality. Corinna checks there is an appropriate **range of temperatures** in the fresh food and freezer compartments at the same time – for example, can you set the freezer at the coldest setting for longer freezer storage while keeping the fresh food section at an optimum 3°C? She also checks how **uniform** the temperature is throughout each compartment. She measures the effect on the fridge and freezer temperatures when the external temperature changes (**ambient change**), such as from

summer to winter. And because many readers tell us they have only changed their fridge controls once – to the **recommended setting** – Corinna assesses the temperatures on this setting. If no recommendation is given, she assesses the factory, or mid, setting. A poor score for this means you should use a fridge freezer thermometer to get optimum temperatures – but we recommend you do this for any fridge.

Energy efficiency This is tested to the Australian standard. Corinna also checks the energy label required by law to be displayed on new fridges. ■

Percentage with no problems in the past 12 months



The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand. * "Other" includes unbranded appliances, appliances for which the brand was unknown and brands which did not meet the criteria for sample size (N=50 or more overall and N=10 or more per year group).

RELIABILITY

Fisher & Paykel and **Westinghouse** consistently make our What to Buy lists, and both are also among the brands our members say they're most likely to buy again. Our reliability survey found up to 13% of problems with fridges relate to fittings such as handles, temperature controls or icing up of food.

Cool running

Denis Gallagher looks at which ceiling fans make you feel cooler in summer while also helping you keep warm in winter

Nutshell

- ▶ A ceiling fan is a cost-effective alternative to an air conditioner.
- ▶ A winter, or reverse, mode can help with your heating in winter too.

With rising power costs, a ceiling fan is a welcome alternative to the air conditioner. You may feel cooler using one and you won't get hot under the collar when you look at your next power bill.

Design is often people's most important criterion for a ceiling fan, but don't be put off if a recommended model doesn't match your décor – there are several different colours and blade configurations for the recommended models, so there should be something to suit your home.

Models in our table (page 64) with the best bedroom performance deliver effective air movement at the lower settings without being too breezy, while those with good living room performance deliver the right amount of air movement at the highest settings. All fans on test are quiet at the low setting; some become noisier at the highest.

If possible, work through the settings of the fans you're interested in buying in-store to see if they suit your requirements. All but the two Hunter Pacific models with remote controls (see below) have three settings, so if the highest setting delivers a tornado

blast that knocks you off your feet and the lowest setting provides atmosphere rather than air movement, you effectively have a fan with only one or two useable settings.

The two Hunter Pacific Typhoons, Cinni Milano and Hunter Pacific Revolution models deliver a good variation of air delivery from the lowest to highest settings. And while the Attitude and Revolution models provide little more than a breath of air at the lowest setting, each has six additional settings, enabling you to find a setting combination that works best for your room.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Fan control options include a pull cord control on the bottom of the fan or a wall switch that usually replaces your light switch. A remote unit provides the most effective control, with the remotes on the Revolution and Attitude allowing you to alter the speed or change direction at the press of a button. These are also suitable for installation in a covered outdoor area. A **fan balance kit** can help correct any wobbles that rob a fan of efficiency and also lead to extra noise during operation. Turning the fan onto the highest setting for a few seconds can

also help improve the overall balance, particularly if you normally use the low setting.

Minimum ceiling height needs to be between 2.1-2.3m, depending on the model you choose. If your ceiling is much higher than this, you may need an extension rod to lower the fan to an optimal operation level.



Cutting costs

Don't switch off your ceiling fan once summer ends and the temperature starts to drop, as it can also help your lower your heating costs. The winter mode setting on a fan, usually presented as a switch or button on the motor, reverses its direction. This draws cool air upwards rather than downwards and pushes the warm air created by your room heater that has risen to the ceiling area back down into the living area where it's needed. All models on test except the Atlas Acqua have this feature. ▶

WHAT TO BUY



91%

Hunter Pacific Revolution, \$475

Good points

- Excellent air movement performance at both the high and low fan speeds
- Easiest fan to operate
- Remote control has seven settings
- Very good range of air delivery movement from low to high setting

Bad points

- No balance kit provided
- Lowest setting delivers very little air movement
- Lighting kit not an option



87%

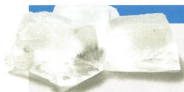
Hunter Pacific Typhoon 316 Stainless, \$389

Good points

- Excellent air movement performance at both the high and low fan speeds
- Easy to operate and easiest fan to assemble
- Good range of air delivery movement from low to high setting
- Balance kit provided to help counter any vibration
- Stainless steel blades rated suitable for indoor or outdoor (undercover) installation in tropical climates

Bad points

- Among the noisier models on test when used at high setting



	COSTS		PERFORMANCE						FEATURES	SPECIFICATIONS			
	Price (\$)	Running costs (\$)	Overall score (%)	Living room performance score (%)	Bedroom performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise - at high speed	Reversible	Balance kit provided	Control type	Number of settings	Number of blades	Fan blade material
# Hunter Pacific Revolution	475	15	91	90	90 (A)	94	Quieter	✓		Remote	7	4	Plastic
# Hunter Pacific Typhoon 316 Stainless	389	22	87	90	90	74	Noisier	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	4	Stainless steel
# Cinni Milano	428	26	86	90	90	69	Noisier	✓		Wall switch (B)	3	3	Aluminium
# Hunter Pacific Typhoon 316 Moulded	299	22	86	90	90	70	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	4	Plastic
# Hunter Pacific Attitude	465	16	79	60	90 (A)	93	Quieter	✓	✓	Remote	7	5	Plastic
# Hunter Savoy	419	32	75	70	90	54	Quieter	✓	✓	Pull cord (B)	3	5	Plywood
# Hunter Pacific Concept II	325	22	74	60	90	72	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	4	Plywood
# Hunter Pacific Icon	460	23	74	60	90	72	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	4	Plywood
# Hunter Carera	399	32	72	60	90	59	Quieter	✓	✓	Pull cord (B)	3	3	Plywood
# Hunter Vista	429	19	71	60	90	57	Quieter	✓	✓	Pull cord (B)	3	5	Plywood
# Atlas Acqua	859	32	70	80	70	48	Noisier			Wall switch (B)	3	6	Solid wood
# Hunter Sonic	299	21	69	50	90	64	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	4	Plywood
Beracove Elegance 24001	195	18	67	40	90	74	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	5	Wood
Martec Orbital MCE276BN	269	21	67	40	90	73	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch	3	3	Plastic
Intercept Ceiling Fan	210	22	64	40	90	61	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch	3	4	Wood
Lucci Futura Eco 210873	219	23	63	30	90	74	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch	3	4	Wood
Sapphire SAP1304BWHT	286	19	60	30	90	62	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch	3	4	Wood
# Hunter Pacific Majestic Coolah	256	22	53	50	50	65	Quieter	✓	✓	Pull cord (B)	3	4	Plywood
# Hunter Industrie II	399	32	48	60	30	59	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	3	Plywood
Hunter Pacific Ec02	335	18	44	30	50	61	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch	3	4	Plastic
Hunter Cabo Frio 24234	389	32	38	30	30	68	Quieter	✓	✓	Wall switch (B)	3	3	Plastic





86%

Cinni Milano, \$428

Good points

- Excellent air movement performance at both the high and low fan speeds
- Greatest fan blade diameter and width of models on test
- Includes integrated LED light

Bad points

- Noisiest model among the conventional ceiling fans on test when used at high setting
- No balance kit provided to help counter any vibration
- Instructions for assembly are poorly printed and difficult to read



86%

Hunter Pacific Typhoon 316 Moulded, \$299

Good points

- Excellent air movement performance at both the high and low fan speeds
- Easy to operate
- Good range of air delivery movement from low to high setting
- Balance kit provided to help counter any vibration

Bad points

- Highest average air speed on low

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USING THE TABLE Scores
the overall score is made up of living room performance (40%), bedroom performance (40%) and ease of use (20%). **Living room performance**

scores the ability of the fan to move air at high speeds, a setting more likely to be used in a larger area during the day. **Bedroom performance** scores the ability of the fan to move air at the lower, quieter settings, most likely to be used at night for a good night's sleep. **Noise levels** The description in the table shows the results for fans set on the highest speed and are relative only. **Running costs** are based on eight hours of high fan use per day for six months of the year, used in summer and part of winter (to help move warm air down to the living area). **Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2012.

TABLE NOTES **na** Not applicable. **(A)** These models have very low air delivery on lowest setting, however one of the next four settings will comfortably deliver the required optimum air delivery for the bedroom. **(B)** Remote optional extra. **(C)** Multiple light fitting options include LED, CFL or E27 standard fitting. **(D)** E27 fitting with maximum wattage, can also accept CFL or LED. **(E)** Includes bracket.

on (setting)	Integrated light	Light wattage	Diameter of blade (cm)	Weight of blade (g)	Contact
na	na	132	456	hunterpacific.com.au	
✓ (C)	100	132	630 (E)	hunterpacific.com.au	
LED	36	140	376	cinni.com.au	
✓ (C)	100	132	401	hunterpacific.com.au	
na	na	132	410	hunterpacific.com.au	
na	na	132	247	hunterfans.com.au	
✓ (C)	100	132	275	hunterpacific.com.au	
✓ (C)	100	137	260	hunterpacific.com.au	
na	na	132	271	hunterfans.com.au	
✓ (D)	2x 60	132	268	hunterfans.com.au	
Halogen	50	2x 39	30	atlasfans.com.au	
na	na	132	217	hunterfans.com.au	
na	na	132	300	beracove.com.au	
✓ (D)	2x 40	130	481	martecceceilingfans.com.au	
na	na	132	289	hunterpacific.com.au/intercept	
CFL	22	130	228	beaconlighting.com.au	
na	na	130	258	impel.com.au	
✓ (C)	150	132	283	hunterpacific.com.au	
na	na	132	223	hunterfans.com.au	
na	na	132	412	hunterpacific.com.au	
na	na	132	432	hunterfans.com.au	



NOT YOUR AVERAGE FAN

The Atlas Acqua stands out from the other models on test based on looks alone – it comprises two sets of smaller fans with the ability to change the angle of the fan to push air in any direction you choose. When placed at an angle, the fan rotates on its axis, providing a wider area of air displacement. A small halogen lamp integrated into the head unit is also included, and it's a good overall performer.

While the Acqua delivers the greatest amount of air movement on the low setting on test, you may find this to be too much air movement when sleeping, and the noise level at high speed is among the highest on test, so it may not be the best option for your bedroom. ■



Chris Barnes

MEET OUR EXPERT

CHOICE knows a thing or two about babies and toddlers.

Our experts have been testing children's products for more than 50 years, offering parents advice and suggestions that save them money and guarantee peace of mind.

This year, one of our experts in this area, Chris Barnes, will take to the Main Stage at The Baby & Toddler Show Sydney (see below) to discuss what to look for when you're buying baby products and give an insider's perspective on how we test at CHOICE. We'd love you to drop by the Main Stage to ask Chris some questions.

The Baby
& Toddler Show
Sydney will be held
28-30 September 2012
at the Sydney Exhibition
Centre Darling
Harbour



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Nutshell

- Competition among car GPS apps is fierce, with continual updates on most apps offering more features and functionality than ever before.
- Google Maps Navigation (Beta) is a good free option for Android users to see what car GPS apps have to offer.

Smart guidance

Car GPS apps continue to improve, making smartphones a genuine navigation alternative to bulkier purpose-built devices, says **Denis Gallagher**

Car GPS apps can transform your smartphone into an effective navigation tool, providing most of the features and functions you'd expect to find on a personal navigation device. Live Traffic updates, turn-by-turn voice direction, itinerary planning and speed camera alerts are some of the features you can expect to find on these apps.

CHOICE looked at 13 apps for the Apple iPhone, Android mobile and Windows Phone platforms. All have delivered map updates since our last round-up in August 2011, with improvements in map accuracy for some units and reduced pricing for live traffic subscriptions for the top-performing models, making it more affordable than ever to transform your smartphone into a useful GPS device.

A mobile network signal will help each app on test establish a positional fix faster, but all the apps except Google Maps (see below) can operate with or without a mobile network signal.

The Google way



The Google Maps Navigation (Beta) app should be considered by all Android mobile owners before buying a car navigation app, if for no other reason than it's free – particularly if you have a generous data plan linked to your mobile and don't need to worry about downloading maps. It delivers the best rural performance, is easy to install and uses 15MB of downloaded map data for 100km of travel, although data rates may vary depending on the maps you need to download during your trip.

You can download maps to view offline and plan a trip, but Google Maps requires a network signal to operate effectively as a turn-by-turn navigation app. As might be expected of a free product, features common on the top-performing paid apps such as vehicle speed display, advanced lane guidance and safety camera warnings aren't available on Google Maps.

While the POI score for Google Maps is among the worst, as many of the POIs were delivered as a search result rather than selecting POIs in various categories, some users may in fact prefer the "Google way" of search and find. We found this feature to be fairly accurate when searching for surrounding POIs such as restaurants and hospitals based on the speak-and-search feature. ▶



WHAT TO BUY

BEST APPLE iOS GPS APP

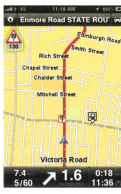


83%

TomTom Australia
(Version 1.10), \$75

Good points

- Best overall navigation performance
- Very good verbal instructions
- Best voice quality on test
- One of the most fully featured apps on test
- Both itinerary and remote trip planning allows you to plan your trip beforehand without needing a GPS fix
- Excellent menu structure and fast predictive text input



Bad points

- Social networking features can be distracting
- Secondary street name text is small

BEST ANDROID GPS APP



75%

Sygic GPS Navigation
(Version 11.2.6), \$31

Good points

- Excellent menu structure and fast predictive text input
- Itinerary trip planning allows you to plan your trip beforehand without needing a GPS fix
- Very good verbal instructions
- Support for landmarks to help enhance guidance options
- Excellent map refresh speed

Bad points

- Secondary street name text is small



		PERFORMANCE										FEATURES										
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)																				
			City performance score (%)	Rural performance score (%)	Verbal instructions score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Display quality score (%)	Points of interest score (%)	Install score (%)	Map refresh score (%)	Advanced lane guidance	Vehicle speed	POIs	Walking mode	Cycling mode	Spoken street names (TTS)	Multiple TTS voices	Safety camera warning	School zone speed limits	Fixed speed camera warning		
	TomTom Australia	75	83	90	70	85	78	80	96	90	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Navigon	70	76	100	50	77	78	65	73	90	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Sygie GPS Navigation	35	75	80	65	70	78	70	81	90	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (C)	✓		
	iGO Primo	33	74	90	50	80	80	70	68	90	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	RoadMate	60	73	90	50	82	80	65	41	90	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	CoPilot Live GPS	35	72	70	45	80	90	80	82	90	70	(A)	✓	✓	✓	✓	(B)	✓	✓	✓		
	MetroView	15	69	85	45	82	78	65	41	90	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Sygie GPS Navigation	31	75	70	65	80	78	70	81	90	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Navigon	60	69	95	20	77	78	65	82	80	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	CoPilot Live GPS	58	68	70	45	77	90	80	64	50	70	(A)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Google Maps Navigation (Beta)	Free	66	70	80	55	78	65	23	90	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Route 66 Maps + Navigation	70	59	70	25	75	73	70	36	80	60	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Nokia Drive 2.0	Free	66	95	65	75	62	65	0	50	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

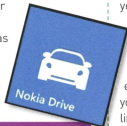
USING THE TABLE Price paid in July 2012, with currency conversion from euros or \$US into \$A. While all the iPhone apps were purchased on the local iTunes app store, some of the Android apps were purchased on the conversion rate at the time. **Scores** The overall score is made up of city performance (20%), rural performance (20%), verbal instructions (20%), ease of use (10%), display quality (10%), points of interest (10%). Look for, far right. **TABLE NOTES** (A) Has it as a listed feature, but does not display as often as with other brands. (B) Available as a \$5.50 in-app purchase. (C) Available in latest version 12.2. (D) While this feature remote trip from Adelaide to Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, including ferry crossing. (E) One-off payment for lifetime updates.

ABOUT THE REST

All the other iOS apps on test except the **MetroView** are good overall performers and worth considering, although the **RoadMate** scores poorly for POI. The **MetroView** does too, and is low on features.

All the other Android apps on test are only OK overall, though **Google Maps** is at least free (see page 67).

If you own a Windows phone your only real choice is the free app **Nokia Drive 2.0**, which is among the top performers in our city test and OK in the rural test for locating the appropriate destinations. But while it uses a similar speak-and-search function to Google's for locating POIs, it's not implemented as well as Google's app and the initial install is more complex than for the others.



SPECIFICATIONS									
Music playback controls in app	Live traffic information (\$ cost per year)	Map provider	Ready to navigate (sec)	Version	Contact				
✓	26	Whereis	8	1.10	tomtom.com				
✓	26	Navteq	6	4.1.3	navigon.com				
✓ (C)	18	Whereis	13	11.2.6	sygic.com				
✓	20 (E)	Navteq	9	9.6.9	igomylway.com				
	10	ALK	4	9.1.5	alk.com				
		PSMA	4	1.5.66	metroview.com.au				
	18	Whereis	7	11.2.6	sygic.com				
	25	Navteq	7	11.2.6	navigon.com				
	10	ALK	4	9.1.5	alk.com				
		Google	2	6.8.1	google.com.au				
		Route 66	4	5.11	66.com				
		Navteq	5	2.00	nokia.com.au				

ther euros or SUS, with the price in the table showing the \$A figure based install score (5%) and speed of map refresh (5%). **Features** See What to apported for short trips, in our testing it was unable to carry out our longer

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Points of interest (POI) are a great way to quickly find landmarks such as hospitals, police stations, shopping centres, tourist attractions and so on. Some apps also allow you to phone these places by selecting the phone number on the screen.

Ready to navigate is the time measured from the moment our tester turns on the unit until the application is ready to accept a destination. This time may differ depending on your location and satellite position.

Walking/cycling mode allows you to plot a route for pedestrians or cyclists, such as taking a short cut through a park or via designated cycle paths.

Speed alert warns you when you exceed the speed limit for the road you're currently on. However, speed limit data in the GPS can sometimes be inaccurate so don't rely solely on the GPS for this information – check the speed limit signs.

Text to speech (TTS) The GPS device announces the street name, for example "turn left into George Street" rather than "turn left in 300 metres", so you know when to turn by watching the road ahead without having to glance at the screen. Some models provide a choice of more than one voice.

Advanced lane guidance tells you when to move to the exit lane and displays complex multi-lane manoeuvres clearly.

School zones Some tell you when you're approaching a school, while others show/sound a speed

alert only. While this may be more common on dedicated car GPS devices, this feature is now appearing more often as an in-app purchase.

Full-route display

Most devices project this as a line on the map from your existing position through to your destination.

Remote trip planning [also known as A-B routing] allows you to plan a route that starts somewhere other than your current location.

Traffic information as a paid option, usually available as an in-app purchase, has live traffic information delivered to you as you drive. Some apps offer the service as a one-month trial, others offer a yearly subscription while the RoadMate app provides the service for the life of the product.

Car GPS cradle To make the most out of your car GPS app, remember to factor in the cost of a good phone cradle. And if you own an

iPhone, you may want to consider a cradle with its own GPS chip (TomTom, Magellan and Navigon all have cradles available) for better performance. Android owners are not as well supported in this regard, with standard-issue cradles the only real option available. ■





Two to go

There are lots of two-seat strollers on the market but only one passes all our safety tests, says **Chris Barnes**

A two-seat stroller is a popular option for transporting two young kids around the neighbourhood. While convenient, these naturally tend to be heavier and bulkier than single-seat strollers and require more effort to push around, especially when loaded with two kids, shopping, nappies and so on.

Your main options are:

- **Side-by-side** The seats are next to each other and usually recline independently. These strollers can be easier to turn than tandems, but are often wide and can be awkward in narrow doorways or supermarket aisles.

- **Tandem** These have front and rear seats, making them no wider than most single-seaters, but being longer they can be harder to manoeuvre.
- **Single-seat stroller with added toddler seat** A versatile combination, though the toddler seat is often not reclinable and the stroller may handle quite differently than when in single-seat mode.
- **An additional platform** (either standing only or with a seat built-in) clipped to the back of the stroller. We haven't tested any of these this time around.

As with our latest tests of single-seat strollers, this test uses the 2009 version of the Australian standard, the most current version, although many manufacturers still refer to the previous version from 2000.

Nutshell

► We've tested nine new double strollers to the 2009 version of the Australian Standard, AS/NZS 2088.

► One tandem model passes all our key tests and one side-by-side model is worth considering.

PERFORMANCE

	Price (\$)	Passed all our safety tests	Passed all our durability tests	Ease of use score (%)
RECOMMENDED				
Childcare Two Up Tandem	300	✓	✓	55
WORTH CONSIDERING				
Chicco Echo Twin	399		✓	65
NOT RECOMMENDED				
Love N Care Twingo BP 9760	499		✓	65
Mothercare Vesta Twin	399		✓	65
Mountain Buggy Duet	699		✓	65
Steelcraft Agile Twin	649		✓	65
Valco Baby Evo 2 for Two	299		✓	65
Mother's Choice Deux Diamond	329		✓	60
Baby Jogger City Select	1098		✓	55

USING THE TABLE Safety and durability tests A stroller can only pass the basket, using the swivel wheel lock, applying/releasing the brakes (25% boot (25%)). **Price** Recommended retail, as of July 2012. **TABLE NOTES** * If when in use, rounded up to the next cm. (A) Variable, which means there are

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Certification to the full Australian Standard AS/NZS 2088, preferably the 2009 version. Strollers must have wrist tether straps with a label warning the adult carer to use them. Brake pedals/levers must be red so they're easily seen.

Reclinable seats (either the whole seat or just the backrest) for comfort and sleeping. Seats that recline flat are suitable for babies less than six months.

Linked, foot-operated brakes mean both rear wheels can be activated by a single action rather than applied individually.

Five-point harness Two shoulder straps, waist straps and a crotch strap. Tug the harness to check the seat doesn't pull away from the frame. Straps should be adjustable to

allow for growth and the buckles easy for you to use. Look for buckles that won't slide off the strap and that undo in such a way as to leave no closed loops in the harness – this reduces the strangulation risk.



Contact

WHAT TO BUY

Childcare Two Up Tandem

Good points

- Passes all our key safety and durability tests
- Front tray with cup holder

Bad points

- Very heavy to steer
- Minor failure of information requirements



ABOUT THE REST

The **Chicco** side-by-side model has no major failures and is worth considering. Its harness has no option for higher anchorage on the seat back, so it's not as adjustable for a larger child and may give them more room to move about while harnessed. However, this isn't likely to cause a hazard in normal use.

The rest fail at least one safety test. In most cases this is due to problems with the harness, such as it not being permanently attached, or forming loops that pose a strangulation hazard should a child slip through and get caught, or having buckles that can slide off the strap. In addition, the **Baby Jogger** and **Mothercare** don't have adequate head barriers to prevent a child sliding out head first when the seat is fully reclined. The **Mothercare's** frame-locking mechanism can be operated with minimal force, making it more likely to be accidentally unlocked or that a child could operate it. On the **Valco Baby**, the secondary frame-locking device doesn't engage automatically when you erect the stroller – you have to manually push it into place – making it more possible the frame could be unlocked accidentally. The **Mother's Choice** has a gap between the rear and front seats that an unharnessed child could slip through and potentially trap their head. ■

FEATURES	SPECIFICATIONS									
	Backrest/seat recline positions*	Front bar or tray	Seats suitable for newborn	Rear brakes	Number of wheels	Maximum recommended weight of child (kg)	Bottom basket capacity (kg)	Stroller weight (kg) **	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D) ***	Contact
Chicco Two Up Tandem	2 / (A)	Tray	Rear	I	4	15	3.0	13.0	107 x 52 x 121	cnpprands.com.au
Chicco Two Up Side-by-side	5 / –		Both	L	6	15	3.0	14.6	107 x 79 x 84	chicco.com.au
Mothercare Two Up Side-by-side	(A)	Bar	Both	L	4	18	6.0	15.1	117 x 74 x 88	lovencare.com.au
Mothercare Two Up Side-by-side	(A)	Bar	Both	L	3	15	4.5	17.1	109 x 87 x 110	mothercare.com.au
Mountain Buggy Two Up Side-by-side	(A)	Bar	Both	L	4	18	5.0	15.8	109 x 64 x 112	mountainbuggy.com
Britax Two Up Side-by-side	(A)		Both	L	4	20	2.0	13.2	110 x 75 x 105	britax.com.au
Valco Baby Two Up Side-by-side	4		Both	I	6	15	7.0	13.3	104 x 76 x 82	valco.com.au
Mother's Choice Two Up Tandem	2 / (A)	Bar	Rear	L	4	15/17 (C)	2.0	13.6	110 x 51 x 109	motherschoice.com.au
Baby Jogger Two Up Tandem + toddler	– / 2		(B)			20.4	6.8	16.8	110 x 64 x 145	babyjoggerstrollers.com.au

all these tests. **Ease of use score** This is made up of various adjustments including safety harness and seat recline (25%), loading and unloading manoeuvring through doors, up/down stairs, turning a tight corner, over rough terrain (25%) unfolding, folding and carrying, including fitting into a car seat models, this shows the options for front and rear seats. ** Including supplied accessories, rounded to the next 0.1 kg. *** Maximum dimensions including footrests. (B) A separate bassinet needs to be purchased for newborns. (C) Front/rear seats. I Individual. L Linked.



Safe haven

Portable cots are handy, but there are some safety issues to keep in mind, says **Rebecca Gatto**

Portable cots are useful when you're on the move, but how can you tell which is safest?

What features should you look out for? And, are accessories such as change tables and bassinets a potential hazard?

CHOICE tested 10 portable cots against requirements of the Australian

standard (see below) that cover the main safety concerns for portable cots, including falls, strangulation and suffocation. Our tests cover requirements for ensuring that the folding mechanism is secure, there are no gaps that could trap a child's head and that the mattress is safe.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Standards certified Check the portable cot is certified to AS/NZS 2195 – either the 1999 or 2010 version.

Easy to assemble and fold away Ideally it shouldn't be too heavy and should come with a carry bag.

Provides good ventilation Each side should be predominantly of a mesh material.

Pockets on the outside are handy for storage. Check that it doesn't prevent airflow, however.

Bassinet, change table, toys and musical entertainment are handy accessories, but bear in mind they come with their own risks.

Capacity Don't use a portable cot if your child weighs more than 15kg.

Mattress should be firm and fit snugly without gaps on any side. Don't put an

additional mattress in the cot and remove all toys, doonas and other items when your child is sleeping. **Inside surfaces** should be free of bumps, ledges and protruding parts so children can't hit their heads, get their clothing snagged or use them as a foothold to climb out of the cot. **Entrapment hazards** There should be no points where a child can trap their head, limbs, or fingers, and no sharp points or edges where a child could potentially injure themselves.

Locking mechanisms The rails should each have at least two locking mechanisms to prevent accidental collapse and closure. Check these are engaged first and that the cot floor doesn't sag.

Nutshell

- Ten new portable cots tested against the mandatory and voluntary requirements of the relevant Australian standards.
- Seven fail either a mandatory clause or what we consider to be a major safety requirement.

The 2010 version of this standard has an important addition that calls for adequate breathable zones (in case your baby manages to roll face-first against the side). This test involves checking that all sides of the cot are made predominantly from a mesh material that allows for airflow through the cot, and it forms part of our primary criteria. We'd like to see portable cots comply with the full voluntary standard, in particular the latest version, which addresses breathability.

Where bassinets and change tables are supplied as accessories, we also assess their safety. For ease of use we check how easy the cots are to set up, move around, pack away and store.

Two new models are recommended.

They pass all major safety requirements but have minor issues surrounding pinching points and sliding. The **Valco Vee Bee Commuter Plus** is worth considering, however when it's in use as a change table there's a potential limb entrapment hazard. ■

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WHAT TO BUY



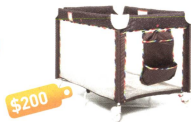
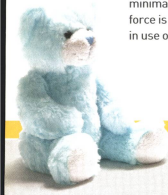
Childcare Orbit XL

Good points

- The cot is easy to assemble and has suitable breathable zones
- Pocket on one end

Bad points

- There are pinch points that pose an injury to the person folding or unfolding the cot
 - Cot slides when a minimal amount of force is applied [when in use on hard floors]



Fisher-Price Luv U Zoo

Good points

- The cot and bassinette have suitable breathable zones
- The cot is easy to assemble
- Pocket on one end
- Mobile with three stuffed toys supplied
- Two wheels with brakes

Bad points

- There are pinch points that pose an injury to the child in the cot and to the person folding or unfolding the cot
- Cot slides when minimal amount of force is applied [when in use on hard floors]
- Some edges at the top of the cot are not generously rounded

ABOUT THE REST

All the others fail the breathability requirements except the **Love N Care** and **Babyco**, but the mattress supplied with them doesn't fit snugly.

We found quite a few failures with the **Aussie Baby** – its supplied mattress doesn't fit snugly and neither cot end has breathable zones. The folding mechanism design poses a neck entrapment hazard and, when used as a bassinette, the gap between the mattress and bassinette ends poses a head entrapment hazard.

The depth of the **Chicco** when in the bassinette position is less than the required amount. Its folding mechanism design also poses a neck entrapment hazard and certain breathable zone dimensions don't meet the specifications.

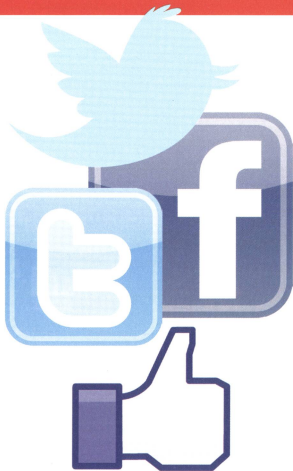
The **Roger Armstrong** has the same failures (except for the neck entrapment hazard) and its mattress also doesn't fit snugly.

	PERFORMANCE			FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS						
	Price (\$)	Passes all our safety tests	Ease of use score (%)	Pocket	Wheels	Brakes	Insect net	Bassinette	Change table	Toys	Dimensions in use (cm, H x W x D)*	Dimensions when packed (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)**	Contact
RECOMMENDED														
Childcare Orbit XL 073210-218	78	(B)	75	✓							80 x 79 x 118	25 x 25 x 80	10.3	cnprbrands.com.au
Fisher-Price Luv U Zoo 074223-230	200	(C)	68	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		79 x 73 x 106	26 x 31 x 79	13.4	cnprbrands.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING														
Vee Bee Commuter Plus N8947	189		30	✓				✓	✓	✓	78 x 78 x 123	25 x 26 x 79	12.7	veebec.com.au
NOT RECOMMENDED														
Aussie Baby CH-8103	100		68	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	78 x 85 x 109	22 x 24 x 79	11.2	aussiebaby.com.au
Babyco Classic 4004695	100		75		✓	✓					77 x 85 x 112	22 x 24 x 78	9.0	babyco.com.au
Chicco Lullaby LX	400		58	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	80 x 79 x 107	28 x 36 x 82	14.7	chicco.com.au
Love N Care 3 in 1 Sleep N Go BP 993CL	219		30	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		78 x 85 x 117	26 x 25 x 80	12.2	lovenecare.com.au
Mother's Choice Baby Cino	179		68	✓	✓	✓	(D)	✓			77 x 84 x 115	25 x 25 x 78	12.7	igcdorel.com.au
Mother's Choice Kingdom Deluxe	200		63	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		77 x 83 x 116	24 x 28 x 79	12.8	igcdorel.com.au
Roger Armstrong Sleep Easy SEE001 (A)	70		58	✓				✓	✓		78 x 80 x 106	23 x 26 x 79	10.4	rogerarmstrong.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of July 2012. **TABLE NOTES** * Maximum dimensions, rounded up to the next cm. ** Rounded up to the next 0.1 kg – includes all accessories supplied. (A) The manufacturer says this model has been superseded and its replacement takes into account the new breathability requirements. (B) Two minor failures only – the cot has pinching points and tends to slide quite easily on a smooth floor. (C) Three minor failures only – the cot and change table have pinching points, the cot tends to slide quite easily on a smooth floor and some edges on the corner pieces are not adequately rounded. (D) As part of a removable canopy.

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12-year-old Baxter Freeman isn't the only one perplexed by the mixed messages on this rope packaging...



Half-witted?

Perhaps the good people at Woolies have had so many knockdowns they're groggy. The reduction shown on this sticker is definitely not half-price.



Hard word

Thanks this month go to Baxter Freeman, Paul Scali, Arthur Lubenfeld and DJ & Jen Lawrence. If you have any examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries - we need the unmarked originals.

A PUZZLE OF SMALL PROPORTIONS

Do they think we're blockheads? It seems the "safety pegs" on this wooden toy are also a choking hazard.



Everything old is new again

We wonder which marketing genius thought "original roast potato" would make a "great new taste".

